
HUGE PREVIEW SPECIAL!
THE LAST OF US PART II
WE DELVE INTO NAUGHTY DOG'S UNBELIEVABLE SEQUEL
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THE ULTIMATE WILD WEST WORLD
DEATH STRANDING
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2
PSYCHONAUTS 2
DAYS GONE
GOD OF WAR
FAR CRY 5
SEA OF THIEVES
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100 GREATEST GAMES OF 2018
AND BEYOND!
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LATEST INFO!
SPIDER-MAN
Could this be the web-slinger's best game yet?
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HANDS-ON!
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Issue 325 / January 2018

"All the latest on every AAA heavy hitter on the horizon"

One issue, one feature, 100 games. That's right, we've done it again – the GamesMaster you hold in your hands contains over three times your recommended daily allowance of games. It is an illegal amount. The Magazine Police are coming for me.

But if spending my life behind bars is the price of making sure you've got all these incredible games on your radar, then hey, lock me up and throw away that key. It is your *right* to have all the goodness coming your way in 2018 and beyond at your fingertips, and our sacred duty to provide.

So read on to discover all the latest on every AAA heavy hitter on the horizon; amazing new titles you've never even heard of; and at least four games that'll make you say "wait, *that's* coming out?!".

Elsewhere, we've explored Skyrim in virtual reality, checked out 2018's weirdest game-to-film adaptation, hung out with a cosplaying dog, and much, much more.

Enjoy your GM!

Robin Valentine – Editor

EDITOR'S CHOICE
MY TOP PICKS THIS ISSUE



40 If you're not already on board, 2018 is the year you need to get into Monster Hunter. Trust me.



72 Cooking meets combat in Battlechef Brigade – two great tastes that taste great together.



86 We look back on a true pioneer – ludicrously explosive shooter Black.





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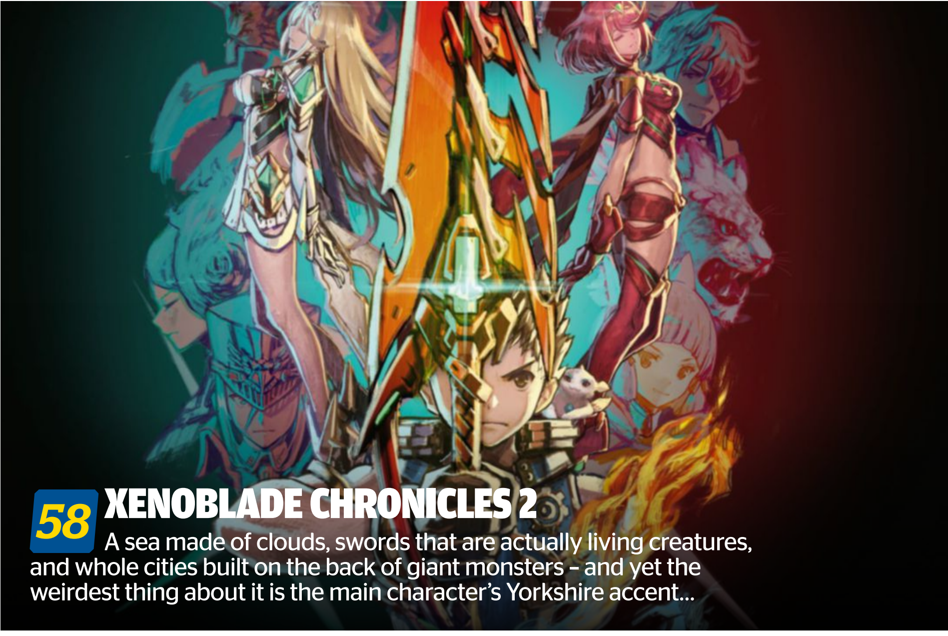


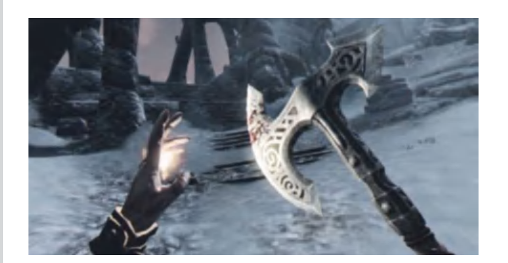
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Team GM

Meet The Magazine's Makers!



THE MOST DEDICATED TEAM IN THE BUSINESS

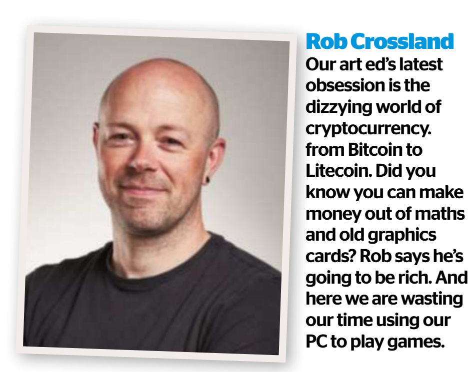
A special kind of madness descends as we pull together this beast of a feature each year. Luckily it's cured by turkey and brussels sprouts, so we'll be back to our old selves by the new year.



Robin Valentine

Not having a staff writer to boss around is really starting to get to Robin. This week we caught him screaming at a potted plant because it wouldn't fetch him a panini. Luckily we've got a new dogsbody starting next issue!

What game are you most looking forward to?
Cyberpunk 2077



Rob Crossland

Our art ed's latest obsession is the dizzying world of cryptocurrency. from Bitcoin to Litecoin. Did you know you can make money out of maths and old graphics cards? Rob says he's going to be rich. And here we are wasting our time using our PC to play games.

What game are you most looking forward to?
Red Dead Redemption 2



Ben Tyrer

Sometimes Ben likes to come over to our desks, tear off little bits of our sellotape and put them on his fingers while he's talking to us. We don't know why. We don't have a joke about it, but you agree it's weird, right? Please write in to us if you agree that it's weird.

What game are you most looking forward to?
The Last Of Us Part II



Louise Blain

For reasons best known to herself, Louise has been trying out the full range of videogame-themed scented candles this month. We were on board for the pine-fresh smell of Skyrim, but the Fallout 'scent of the post-apocalypse' hasn't done much for the office ambience.

What game are you most looking forward to?
Spider-Man



Issue 325/January 2018

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FANBASE

The best of your emails, tweets, and carrier pigeon death threats

Nintendo may be a little backward about some things, such as online functionality, but it takes risks where it counts.

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Aston writes in about 2017's most incredible comeback

Nintendo has been in the console game for over 30 years, and has always at least stayed in the back of gamers' minds. But then came the Wii U, and everyone seemed to jump ship and leave Nintendo to sink. But, Nintendo didn't sink. It hung on and, oh boy, it's come back with all guns blazing.

2016 was when we first saw the Switch, and as I watched the reveal trailer for it, something sparked in me. I realised at that moment that Nintendo had succeeded again, that it was on its way back into the console wars, and it'd brought the big guns this time. Nintendo is genius. It's made a console to play at home and on the go, and, as usual, it's put fun before graphics.

The Switch is selling well, and Nintendo's given us a great launch title with Breath Of The Wild, which compensated for the small pool of day one release games. And now the amazing Super Mario Odyssey has come out too!

Nintendo may have been left in the dust for the past five years, but it's returned with its strongest idea since the DS.

Xbox One and PS4 may have better graphics and more power, but you'll never have as much fun as with a Nintendo console, and that is why it's been here for 30+ years – and will still be here for many years to come!

Aston Cooke, email

Never count Nintendo out, we always say! It's survived worse than Wii U before and come back swinging, and it never stops innovating. When it fails, it's a mess, but when it succeeds, the industry's never the same again. ■



While Wii U was a misstep, during that period the 3DS range of handhelds was actually really successful.

WIN!

Got an opinion? Have even the barest grasp of words and how to put them together? The best letter bags a free mystery prize!*

*Don't forget to include your postal address and chosen gaming format!



Finish line

How often do you complete games?

I have to finish the one I'm on before moving on. Two reasons: one, I'm not good enough to switch my mind to two different control schemes; which leads on to my second point, if I do start another game while I'm halfway through one, I completely forget what I'm doing and the game is now harder because I can't control it, and don't know what I'm doing!

Clint Gardner, Facebook

My pile of games finished is vastly smaller than my massive pile of games I've played quarter or halfway through. I like starting games, just not finishing them. Mainly because some games I get so attached to I don't want it to end!

Ryan Booth, Facebook

I have loads half-finished as I only play games by my mood and if it changes I tend to stop playing that game, then a day or so later I get in the mood for another. It's rather chaotic.

The Macabre Gamer, @TheMacabreGamer

Naturally, on Team GM we're always splitting our free time between far too many half-finished games screaming for our attention... Such is the glamorous life of a games journalist!

Reality check

I really want to get into VR, but the cost of buying a PlayStation VR headset, which is now more expensive than a standard PS4 console, puts me off! Once you've added the camera and the accessories you have to sell one of your kidneys to pay for it... I've also heard it doesn't run as well unless you have the Pro console?

Back in the early '90s I played the original VR machines that were set up in arcades. Even back then I was totally blown away by how amazing it was to be immersed into a gaming world. But the machines were mainly racers or just walking around, and the graphics were very blocky.

The PS VR headset looks like it has too many wires coming out of it; that may become an issue if you start moving about. Have you used one? Is the headset heavy? I think it will be a success but not for another five or ten years. The only way I see them improving is if you get a suit to go with it and you stand in a gaming treadmill to make the most of the VR experience.

READER REVIEW

Charlie Ridgewell writes in with his verdict on **Call Of Duty: WWII**

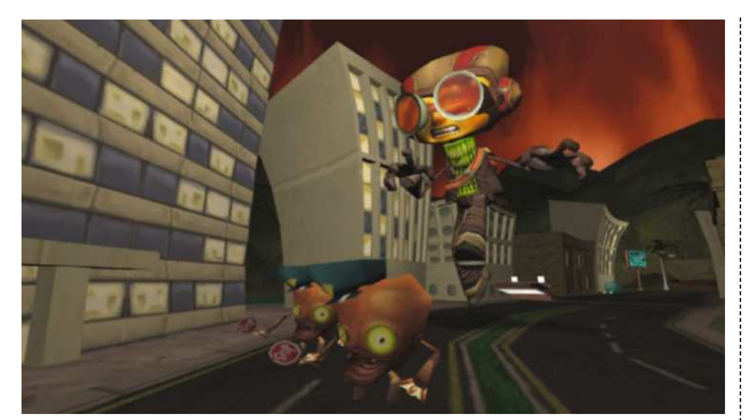


Call Of Duty is a franchise that has certainly had its ups and down the past couple of years, not helped by three-year development cycles that have meant the past five titles have been near future or futuristic with 3D movement.

Although World War II isn't anything new to the franchise, it sure is a refreshing change of pace, a necessary one, and I'm glad to tell you that this is a great game.

If you haven't enjoyed the past trilogy of games with advanced movement, this is a great return to classic COD. This isn't near the heights of World At War in terms of campaign, but the single-player is definitely worth a playthrough. The main fun to be had, though, is the multiplayer, with its consistent maps, 'War' mode, gun balance, and divisions system. And Zombies fans should really enjoy Sledgehammer's take on the mode. It may not be the series best, (MW2 and 3, BO2 and 3) but it's a very enjoyable entry all around!

85%



"I DREAM OF A DAY WHEN I AM STANDING IN MUSHROOM KINGDOM"

I just wondered what your thought are on VR, and if PS VR is anywhere near as good as the Oculus Rift?

I dream of a day when I am standing in Mushroom Kingdom or Hyrule taking a break from the rat race or the kids...

Sam Hamilton, email

PS VR is an impressive bit of kit, and far more affordable and accessible than most of the alternatives. But it's definitely very expensive for something that still feels more like a novelty than the next step in gaming. As you say, the hardware alone costs a wodge of cash, but you're also paying a premium for the software. Software which, as it stands, mostly feels very slight compared to non-VR games.

The headset's certainly not heavy – it's remarkably comfortable actually, though like any VR helmet it gets a bit warm and sweaty after about 45 minutes, and you're right that the wires can be a pain. You certainly don't need a Pro – we've done plenty of VR gaming on a normal PS4 and haven't noticed any performance problems.

One of our biggest issues with it has actually been the motion controls. The PS Move wands are showing their age, and their lack of accuracy can be frustrating. The Oculus Touch controllers are much more impressive.

We've definitely enjoyed our time with it, but it's more for early adopters than the average punter. We'd say if you're at all put off by things like cost or trailing wires, then you're probably better off waiting a few years for VR to become more mainstream and refined.

Stage right

What's the best videogame level ever?

The Facility level from GoldenEye. Loved shooting the first guard's hat off then planting mines throughout the level, causing chaos.

Andy Rigby, Facebook

Lungfishapolis from Psychonauts. How often do you get to be the kaiju?

Serathis, @Serathis1

The crying baby level from Max Payne. Because I love crying babies.

Bill Gardner, @GameOnGardner

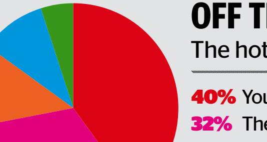
Liberty Island from Deus Ex. The most complete demo ever, and a great little pocket of player choice.

Blazej Krakowiak, Facebook

Our new favourite is New Donk City from Super Mario Odyssey. We'll never forget that festival sequence! ■

OFF THE CHART!

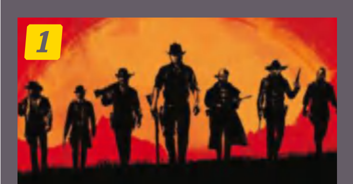
The hot topics you've been gabbing about



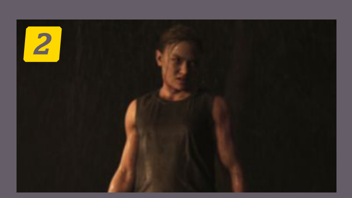
40% Your favourite videogame villains
32% The best sidekick ever
13% Gaming over the holidays
10% How many games do you have on the go?
05% A near miss with Pat Sharp

YOUR TOP 5 MOST WANTED

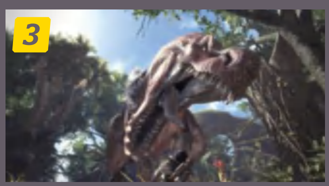
The most exciting upcoming games, as voted for by you on our Facebook and Twitter pages



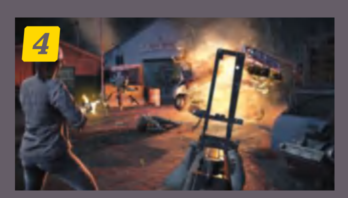
RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2
Format PS4, XO **ETA** Spring 2018
It's had the top spot long enough now that we're running out of funny things to say about cowboys. But at least you can read the latest info on p24!



THE LAST OF US PART II
Format PS4 **ETA** Winter 2019
Naughty Dog provides just the bleak apocalypse we all need to cheer us up at the moment. Check out our preview over on p32 for more.



MONSTER HUNTER WORLD
Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** 26 Jan 2018
Killing beasts and wearing their skin is a tradition as ancient as man, and now you too can enjoy the world's oldest hobby in game form. More on p40.



FAR CRY 5
Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** 27 Feb 2018
It's chaos in America as a crazed villain takes control. Also there's a new Far Cry game coming out next year. Find out the latest over on p50



DAYS GONE
Format PS4 **ETA** Winter 2018
Ah, the open road. A rumbling bike under your bum, a stretch of tarmac ahead of you, and an endless horde of zombies behind. Magic. More on p23.

YOU LOVE GAMES

Cool stuff and videogame culture

@VGElucidator's made their own stunning tribute to Samus with this Metroid montage.

Kieran Rose sent in these amazing portraits of Cloud and Ryu – for more of his work, follow him @kieranroseart

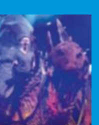
Tracer's raided Roadhog's wardrobe in this piece by @SpaghettiPirate. We're not sure why, but she's working it.

Can't be that many people out there with a stash of game standees, but Ray Netley's got quite the collection.



SOCIAL GROUSING

Wisdom and weirdness from our bustling social media channels



Ellie from The Last Of Us is the best sidekick. If someone's shooting at you she'll swear at him to draw his attention and then twat him with a brick.

Alex Eagles, @Cynibot



Great seeing GamesMaster dropping the praise on the first PlayStation game I ever fell for (Ratchet & Clank). Loved collecting them ol' orbs.

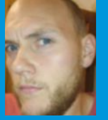
Jake Wilson, @wlsnjk

MANIAC OF THE MONTH!



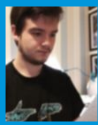
On Sonic 2's 25th Anniversary I hope GM finally do the right thing and post an official apology for giving it 65%.

James Winn, @JimDickWinn



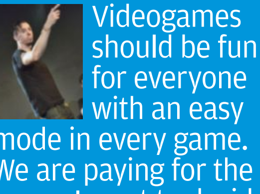
Just tapped a mayonnaise jar 10,000 times, can't wait for your review.

Daniel Reid, Facebook



The development Big Boss had in Snake Eater made him one of the most fully formed villains ever. He's the heart and soul of the Metal Gear franchise who you often find yourself loving and hating at the same time.

Thomas Broome-Jones, @TBroomey



Videogames should be fun for everyone with an easy mode in every game. We are paying for the game, I want to decide how to play it.

Jason Grieve-Actor, @jaybirdie1

SCREENSHOT SHOWCASE

This month's best snaps



Final Fantasy XIV
Gemma Long, Facebook

Super Mario Odyssey
Shiiva, @shiiva

Assassin's Creed Origins
Thomas Conneely, @T_Dog109

Kerbal Space Program
Viktor Boskovic, @ViktorBoskovic


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ROCK & ROLL

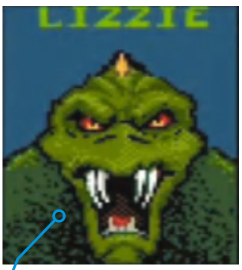
Dwayne Johnson heads up a big-screen take on Midway classic, **Rampage**

MONSTER MASH

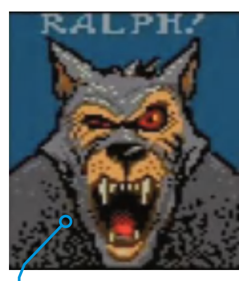
The stars of the '86 game which inspired the film's beasties



Originally just a common-or-garden giant ape, George has been given a dramatic albino makeover for the new movie. Lookin' good!



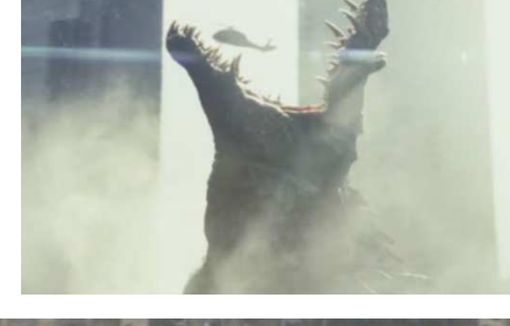
Lizzie, presumably named such because of her lizard-like qualities, is a mutated crocodile in the new film, and looks a bit less like Godzilla...



Why did Midway name a terrifying werewolf creature Ralph? That was his human name before eating mutation-causing hotdogs. Yes, really.









Get used to the sight of The Rock standing amid rubble looking worried; there's a whole lot of that here.



Of all the games you'd make into a Hollywood blockbuster, a 1986 arcade game about ruddy great monsters reducing cities to rubble while twatting away the military forces trying to stop them might not be the most obvious choice, but here we are: Rampage will be hitting cinemas come 20 April, with Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson, no less, playing the lead role. Given that the original game appeared to be heavily inspired by kaiju movies such as King Kong and Godzilla, it's perhaps not so surprising to see things come full circle with a movie adaptation.

The movie version bulks out the plot from "a trio of monsters smash up cities" to something a bit more involved – but don't worry, there's still certain to be carnage aplenty. Unlike arcade Rampage, the main trio of beasties aren't Hulk-esque mutated humans, but animals that some nefarious sorts have genetically altered to be both really big, and really aggressive. We don't need to tell you that that's not a great combination for anyone with an interest in maintaining the structural integrity of America's great cities.

"RAMPAGE ISN'T OSCAR-BAITING, BUT IT SURE DOES LOOK COOL, WITH SOLID CGI EFFECTS"

Johnson's character Davis was mates with albino gorilla George before he became a city-levelling monster, and teams up with a genetic engineer – played by Skyfall/Spectre's Moneypenny, Naomie Harris – to revert his simian pal to a less lethally destructive state, before the military blows him to smithereens. There's also the presence of a smug Jeffrey Dean Morgan (The Walking Dead's Negan), who gives off some seriously sinister vibes – think smarmy government suit who reckons he can control the monsters and causes all sorts of trouble for our plucky heroes. Oh, and there's a ginormous crocodile and wolf to contend with too, inspired by Lizzie and Ralph from the games, because one unfathomably large and destructive beast would just be too easy.

George W Crush

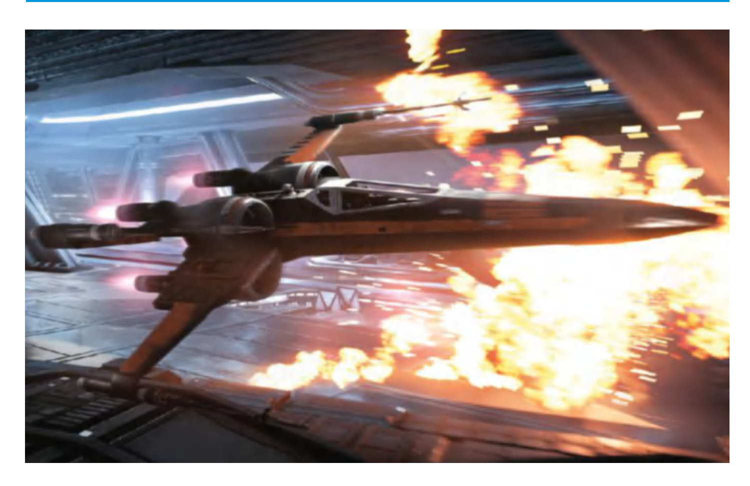
The latest footage is full of bombast – a 30-foot wolf leaping into the air to down a helicopter, a plane crash with a ginormous ape wreaking havoc on board, and more explosions than a Michael Bay supercut. Oscar-baiting it ain't, but it sure does look cool, with solid CGI effects that'll no doubt look incredible in IMAX. And, of course, The Rock brings his usual brand of badassery and humour to this, his second videogame-themed movie of recent times (the first being the Jumanji reboot). Either Dwayne's a big fan of games, or casting directors have realised he's the real-life version of the archetypal videogame hero.

Warner Brothers owns the rights to other Midway classics, including Mortal Kombat, so who knows what other retro games might make the leap to the silver screen if Rampage is a success? Videogame movies might not have a great track record (we're looking at you, Super Mario Bros), but Rampage has all the ingredients to be a daft, enjoyable blockbuster channeling a Mighty Joe Young vibe. ■

Is EA the baddie? Perhaps a campaign where you're on the Empire's side should've been a giveaway.

LOOT LEADS TO SUFFERING

Everyone's been having a bad feeling about Star Wars Battlefront II's controversial loot boxes



Star Wars Battlefront II should have been an easy success for EA. Taking on board criticism from the first game by making a bigger sequel spanning the entire saga's timeline, and even a single-player campaign – what could go wrong? Instead, its launch was marred by controversy over how locked content and progression tie into loot boxes and microtransactions.

While these progression systems were known in beta testings, Origin subscribers were the first to get a rude awakening, learning that all the iconic heroes and villains were locked behind in-game currency, with Darth Vader initially costing 60,000 credits, an amount one Reddit user calculated would take up to 40 in-game hours to earn. Of course, that long grind could also be mitigated through gaining credits from loot boxes, or ponying up actual cash to obtain more.

Reddit strikes back

An attempt by the EA Community Team to defend the unlocking system as a way "to provide players with a sense of pride and accomplishment" had an even stronger backlash, becoming the most downvoted post in Reddit's history. The backlash prompted a climbdown from EA, who slashed the cost of characters by 75 per cent, though in the process it also reduced the value of rewards earned from the campaign by the same amount.

This didn't solve the issue that the game's Star Card system would still mean that players willing to pay a premium for more Star Cards from loot boxes would have an unfair advantage in an online competitive environment. But at the 11th hour of Battlefront II's worldwide launch, DICE's general manager Oskar Gabrielson announced all microtransactions would be removed from the game, meaning all progression will only be earned through playing. In short, it seems the consumers' revolt paid off in the end.

On the other hand, EA's U-turn may have resulted from not the mass outrage but from Star Wars' owner Disney, no doubt concerned that a game that should have helped hype up the release of The Last Jedi was now reflecting badly on its "marquee property".

In any case, it's clear that EA's efforts can't put the controversy back in the box. Not only has the backlash affected the firm's stock price, wiping $3.1 billion off its shareholder value by the end of November, an online petition for EA's licence of Star Wars to be revoked has been gathering momentum, and the controversy has also ignited a wider

"IT'S ALSO IGNITED A WIDER DEBATE ON WHETHER LOOT BOXES CONSTITUTE GAMBLING"

Disney expected Battlefront II to be great advertising for The Last Jedi, not to potentially damage the brand.

debate on whether loot boxes in games constitutes gambling.

There is no buy

At the time of writing, Belgium's justice minister has called for loot boxes to be banned Europe-wide, while in the US, Hawaii's representative Chris Lee is cracking down on "predatory practices" in videogames, dubbing Battlefront II "a Star Wars-themed online casino". It's something of a shock that Star Wars could find itself joining Mortal Kombat, GTA, and Detroit: Become Human as a new poster child for moral panic in games – no wonder Disney is upset.

By the time you read this, even with Detroit capturing most of the tabloids' attention, the controversies are unlikely to have died down as Battlefront II still has 'free' post-launch content planned, while the developers are looking at how to reintroduce in-game purchases (although a focus on "not violating the canon" means cosmetic items are probably unlikely). But regardless of the amount of content or the even the quality of the final game itself, which you can read our review of over on p68, this whole debacle has left a huge, pervasive stink over what should have been the most exciting game for the holidays. ■

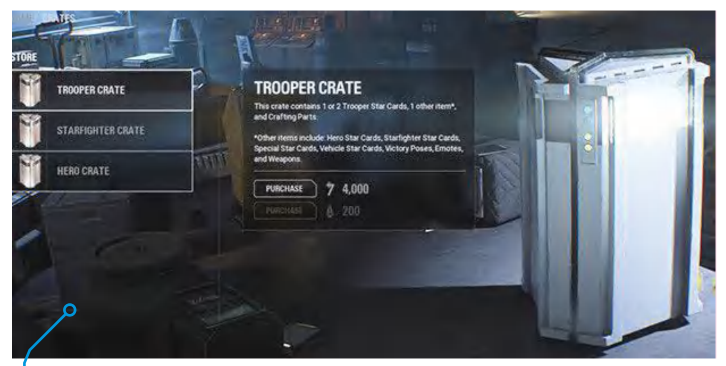


It's not enough to just pick up hero cards like before, you still have to pay to unlock them. As Han Solo said, "Never tell me the odds!"









This could be the worst idea connected to Star Wars since someone said, 'Hey, why don't we make a Holiday Special'. And that was a Wookiee error.

Sean Bean lends his vocal tones to the trailer, and in typical Sean Bean fashion, his character ends up dying.



As well as the extra features, this expansion includes nine new leaders, eight new civilisations, and eight new world wonders. How civilised.

WHAT GOES UP MUST COME DOWN

Unearthing the details of Civilization VI's expansion Rise And Fall



Anyone who knows a jot about history knows that empires, no matter how powerful, come and go. In this, the first expansion to last year's Civilization VI, developer Firaxis is adding extra layers to the turn-based strategy title, allowing you to build up your mighty nation and see it reduced to dust before your tear-filled eyes.

The new Loyalty system is clearly designed to increase the pressure. Every city has its own Loyalty rating, and if it drops too low that city might declare independence or come under new leadership. In this way, you can find a city snatched from your control irrespective of your military might. You've got to keep the people on your side!

As you go about building your civilisation, you'll encounter events that shake up the gameplay, and potentially turn the tide on your fortunes. These come in both Dark Age and Golden Age varieties – each with their own challenges and opportunities. Perform well and you'll usher in a joyous, Loyalty-filled Golden Age, but perform badly and you might find yourself thrust into a devastating Dark Age.

Emergencies are a new addition to test leaders who've gained a considerable advantage over an area. They invite others to compete in Emergency-specific objectives against the dominant player, adding excitement as well as balance.

Rise And Fall looks like providing the geopolitical up-and-down to keep the game lively. Eager to leave a lasting legacy? You can do so on 8 February.

"EMERGENCIES ARE A NEW ADDITION TO TEST LEADERS WHO'VE GAINED A CONSIDERABLE ADVANTAGE OVER AN AREA"

You can battle it out in single-player, or play with or against friends, or complete strangers, online.

RELICS AND ENJOY YOURSELF

Gearing up for 40K's first 4X strategy game



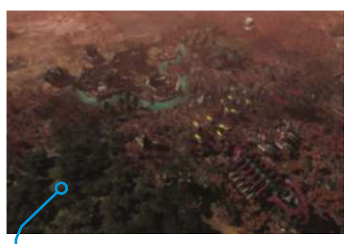
Adding to the legion of games set in the Warhammer 40,000 universe is the newly announced Warhammer 40,000: Gladius – Relics Of War. The series' first foray into 4X turn-based strategy territory, it's developed by Proxy Studios, makers of Pandora: First Contact. Slitherine will helm publishing duties for the third time, having already previously partnered with Games Workshop for Warhammer 40,000 games Armageddon and Sanctus Reach.

The game features four playable factions: Astra Militarum, Space Marines, Orks, and Necrons, each offering an individual playstyle, as well as their own distinct units, heroes, and technological tree. The action takes place on the once-idyllic planet of Gladius Prime. Colonisation of this world resulted in the discovery of mysterious ancient relics, and while their unearthing provided information on the planet's history, unfortunately, all that digging around also awakened a terrible horror. We guess it didn't appreciate the wake-up call.

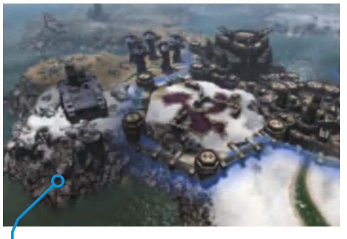
There's an element of role-playing to the 4X-style combat-focused gameplay. Your hero units are able to utilise unique abilities and items, including those aforementioned ancient relics – their actions increase their rank and power, granting an advantage over troublesome factions competing for control over the planet's crucial resources.

Harvesting those resources and researching new technologies to bolster your death-dealing machinery and expand your empire is key to ensuring your faction emerges victorious in this brutal war for planetary dominance. As well as having to face off against other opponents, this randomly generated world is ripe with wildlife ready to tear your troops apart. Nothing can just be pleasant in Warhammer, can it? Gladius is coming to PC only, but no release date has been announced yet. ■

"YOUR HERO UNITS CAN UTILISE UNIQUE ITEMS, INCLUDING POWERFUL ANCIENT RELICS"

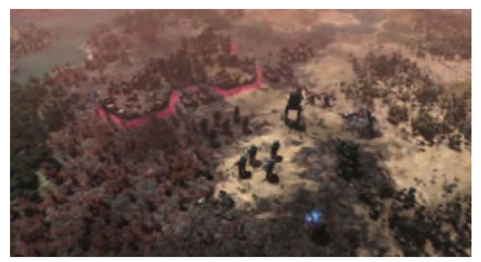


Each faction provides a unique storyline and gameplay experience which promises plenty of replay value.



We're rooting for the Necrons. A mysterious race of robotic skeletal warriors, what's not to like?







HURLEY ACCESS
ADVENTURES IN EARLY ACCESS
With your host...
LEON HURLEY

SKELETON CREW

Whipping up some treasure-seeking fun in City Of Brass



You know what roguelikes usually look like: top-down adventures you play over and over again, hoping to get just one level further. City Of Brass takes that idea and creates a first-person Prince Of Persia full of skeletons and treasure. Let's see how far Leon gets with a whip, a sword and, you know... his usual luck at this sort of thing.



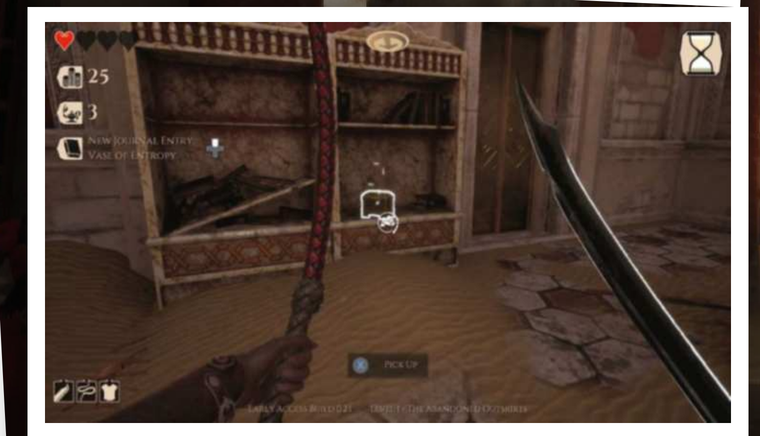
0 MINUTES

The best thing about playing a new game is that sense of wonder. What's going to happen? What will I se... it's a screaming skeleton with its head in a box. I was not expecting tha... Spikes! *There are spikes coming out of the floor.* It's possible I should have paid more attention to the tutorial. I mean, I played it, I just wasn't expecting City Of Brass to throw so much at me in the first room. Well, technically not even the first room as, while the spikes do horrible things to parts of my anatomy I don't want to think too much about, the box-headed skeleton headbutts me back through the door. He has to headbutt you see, on account of not having any arms. My adventuring begins with frantic back-pedalling in the starting area, desperately swinging a sword and definitely making manly noises.



2 MINUTES

Eventually, I defeat the Box-Headed Skeleton with some totally intentional and not at all wild sword swinging, then try to advance to room two. Here I learn two very interesting things about the Box-Heads. Firstly, they charge at your face like angry, bony bulls, and secondly they *scream the whole time it's happening*. It's not unlike my approach to Mondays. But I do manage to remember a couple of things from the tutorial – namely, as well as whip and sword attacks, I can also shove things, so with some careful dodging I avoid an incoming charge, then shove my enemy over a spike trap. The same goes for the second enemy, a more normal skeleton with clothes and arms. I feel positively victorious as the massive metal poles shatter his spindly body. Go me! Still only in the second room. Shut up.



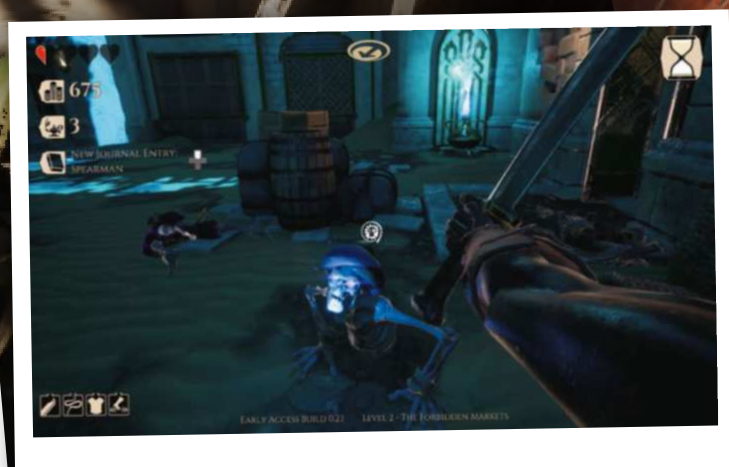
10 MINUTES

The problem here is that I didn't really think about the fact that City Of Brass is a procedurally generated roguelike. It doesn't mean to be cruel, it was just made that way. So I need to bring my 'A' game here and prepare for anything, because the random placement of rooms, traps and enemies means anything can happen. So pay attention, don't get distract... *Oooh, shiny things.* Obviously the whole point of a game like this is gathering treasure, so I set about stuffing my pockets with gold pots and trinkets. That definitely worked out okay for Aladdin, right? Because I have a whip that can be used to pick up things from a distance, I refuse to use my hands, instead snapping up everything with Indiana Jones-like cracks of leather. However, as soon as I enter the next area a Box-Head charges and kills me.



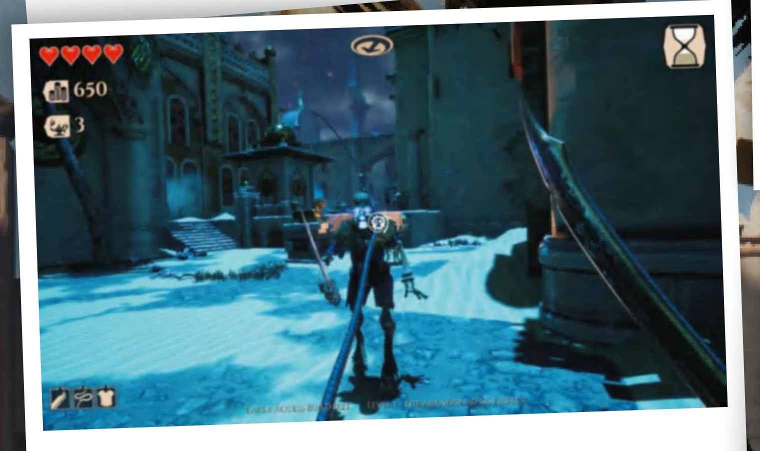
15 MINUTES

Time to get serious if I'm to avoid getting my skeleton-battered ass handed back to me. I need some rules. Number one: no entering a room without stopping to look for traps. Number two? Well, number two doesn't happen as Box-Heads charge and the next five minutes are spent back-pedalling while trying to get the hang of the combat. In the process of which I walk into three spike traps and a sand jet thing that flays the flesh from my bones. At least before I die I discover a range of explosive pots and flaming lanterns I can grab and throw. I'm slowly unravelling how things work and, hopefully, a few more ways of making things that aren't me, dead.



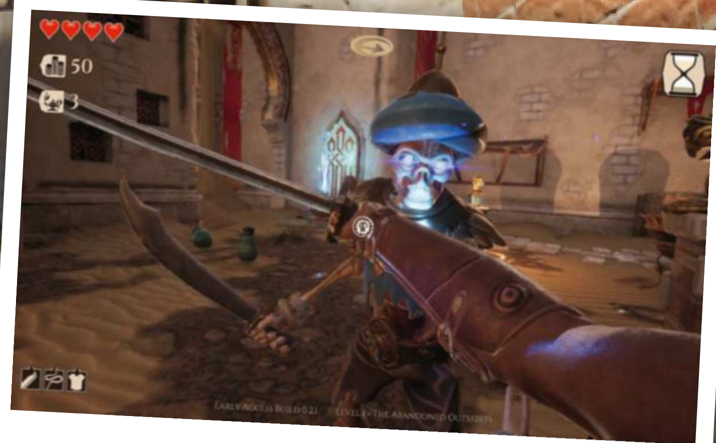
1 HOUR

I've reached the second area, The Forbidden Markets. It brings all sorts of horrible surprises. I discover my first poison chest, for example. Instead of gold it's filled with rotting bones. I look at them, wondering why anyone would put them in a box, until a noxious green cloud takes me down to one hit of health for a while. It's temporary, but could have been disastrous if there were any enemies around. There are trapdoors that can drop you into spike pits, just in case the bog-standard spikes were getting boring. There's also a new enemy, a legless skeleton that screams and jumps around on his hands in exactly the way you'd hope half a dead body wouldn't.



30 MINUTES

I am the whip master. It's probably my most useful tool. Not only can it pick things up, it can steal weapons from enemies' hands, stun them if you hit them in the face, or knock them over if you go for the legs. For a while it's all I do – stun enemies and then push them into traps, or knock them to the floor while I attack someone else. The mechanics are starting to make sense. Throw an explosive pot, position yourself so something runs into a trap, whip one thing, sword another. I'm starting to enjoy this. So much so that I forget about the time limit. You can't stay in a level forever and when it runs out everything turns red and fireballs chase you down. I don't last long.



2 HOURS

I'm a seasoned adventurer now. I've perfected a rhythm of pot-throwing, skeleton-shoving, whip-cracking level clearing. I've reached the third area, The Tortured Dwellings, but I think that's going to be it for a while. Like all good roguelikes, just getting better is half the battle. There are all sorts of new things to deal with. Like massive holes in the ground giving you less room to move around in. There are loads of new enemies to master too – spearmen, archers, wizards, and fireball-throwing genies are all thrown into the mix, and I haven't even seen the gatekeeper I need to defeat to get to level four. As far as Hurley Access goes my time here is at a very spiky end, but this is one Early Access game I'm going to keep playing because whipping skeletons' hats off never gets old.



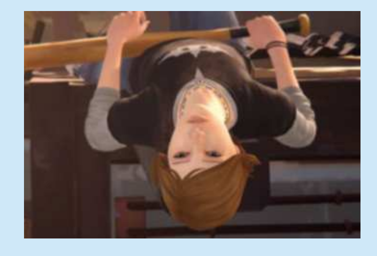
45 MINUTES

My runs are getting longer at least. Less stepping back onto spikes, more face whipping. As you'd expect from the Arabian Nights setting, there are genies who can sell you stuff. There's health to be had and other weapons to pick up. Things like a heavy cleaver with slow, weighty blows that are murder to time but devastating when you get it right. Or a neat little rapier which I immediately fall in love with. It does less damage but uses fast little pokey jabs to clear space – handy when a bunch of stuff rushes at you. There are plenty of other things as well, randomly dished out if you have the coin: more stealthy shoes, armour, and so on.

GOOD BONE STRUCTURE

This is a great example of how to do Early Access right: a well-formed, enjoyable game that feels complete enough to enjoy already, while having so much more on the way. It's only had one major update so far but the mechanics and options already create something that's hugely replayable. The core loop of whip-cracking, sword-swinging, pot-throwing combat is already great fun, relying on quick wits to make the best of the chaos that invariably emerges. The traps and enemy types increase the variety. Clearly future updates are only going to add more toys to play with, and open up the options even more. Expect this to be an easy Early Access success story.





PRICE IS RIGHT

Life Is Strange's Chloe Price is changing voice again… or should we say, reverting to her original voice? Voice actor Ashly Burch, who originated the role, wasn't available for prequel Before The Storm because of a voice actors' strike. It's now been announced that she'll be returning to the series for a bonus episode, Farewell, which also gives you a final chance to play as Max, played by original actor Hannah Telle.

IT'S-A MOVIE!

What can expunge the ghastly memory of 1993's Super Mario Bros movie from our minds? How about an animated Mario movie from Illuminations, the company behind Despicable Me? That should do it. Rumour says it'll be all systems go once Nintendo okays it.

NO! IT'S-A MEAL!

Or if you're in the US, you could wipe the bad taste the film leaves from your mouth with a box of Super Mario Cereal, complete with little mushroom-shaped marshmallows. Then play it, because there's an amiibo built into every box. We hope a British supermarket gets some in!

MEGA-NIFICENT

What better way for Capcom to celebrate Mega Man's 30th birthday than by announcing Mega Man 11? The side-scrolling 2.5D platformer is in the very earliest stages of development and so Capcom says it'll have more details for us next summer. That's an awfully long time to wait – but as we didn't expect this at all, we'll be forgiving.

Topping the leaderboard this issue







MO MORE HEROES

Free-to-play game Marvel Heroes closed over a month earlier than expected. Instead of the anticipated 31 December shutdown, the servers were switched off on 27 November. That's a rough deal for the players, many of whom are trying to get refunds for in-game purchases, and rougher still for staff at Gazillion, who were laid off the day before US Thanksgiving without redundancy payments.



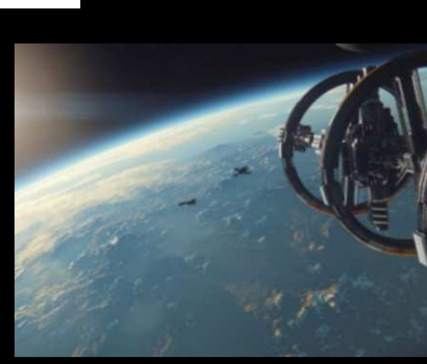
SOULS-LESS

Demon's Souls will be losing its online support next February. The PS3 exclusive, which was the precursor to Dark Souls, will still be playable, but without elements like multiplayer and those telltale bloodstains left by other players, it'll be a much less rich experience. If you want to experience it in all its glory, you've got till 28 February. After that, you'll just have to hope they eventually do a remaster…



LEVEL PAYING FIELD

Reddit users discovered an XP scaling system has been inserted into Destiny 2 – earn XP too quickly and the rate at which you could earn it decreased without telling you, making it harder to earn Bright Engrams. Of course, you could always buy them with real money instead… Bungie's apologised, but kept the changes – but now at least the interface is honest about how much XP you're earning.



STAR BUY

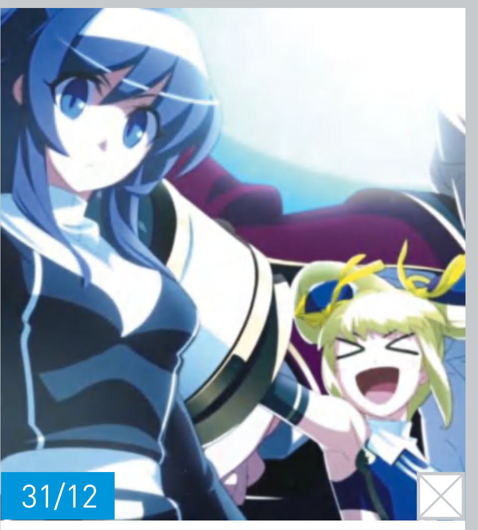
The game doesn't exist yet, and players have already spent over $168,000,000 on it, yet Star Citizen is offering players the chance to purchase land that's already been zoned as industrial, commercial, or residential. A 4x4km 'lot' will set you back $50; an 8x8km 'estate' costs $100. These 'land claim licenses' will help fund further game development. Call us cynical, but we'll wait to play before we pay.



25/12

CHRISTMAS DAY

A day for family... or blocking them out with the gaming goodies they gave you.



31/12

FIGHT NIGHT

The world's weirdest titled video game is out now, Under Night In-Birth Exe:Late[st].



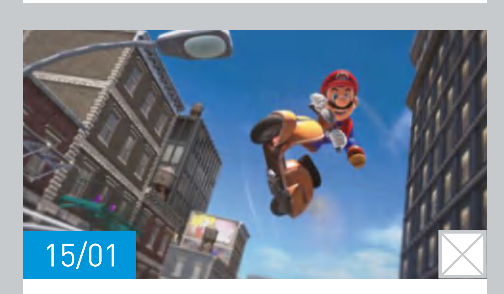
01/01

NEW YEAR'S PLAY

Happy New Year! 2017 was a stonker for games, and 2018 should be even better.

THE GM TO DO LIST

Crucial dates for your gaming diary. If you only do one thing this month, eat, but otherwise make a note of these events...



15/01

BEAT THE BLUES

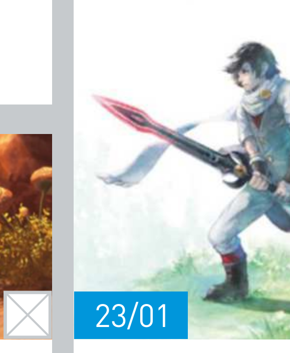
It's 'Blue Monday', the most miserable day of the year. Play something cheerful!



16/01

HIT THE STREET

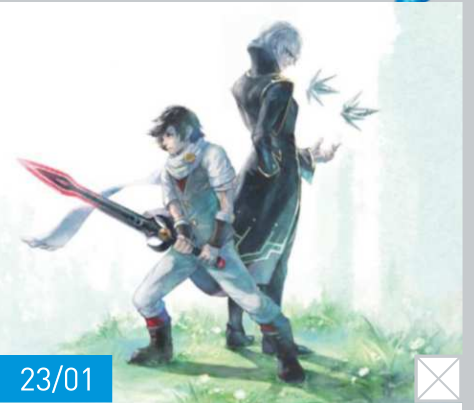
Street Fighter V Arcade Edition is out now, bringing loads of updates to the game.



19/01

FISTS OF FURRY

Ni No, Ni No, it's off to build your kingdom in Ni No Kuni II you go... Nice ears, mate.



23/01

SPHEAR NO EVIL

Enjoy a bit of old-school RPGing and restore a world using your memories in Lost Sphear.

25/01

WINTER WARMER

If Santa didn't get you a sub to GM – the git – you'd better jog to the shop to buy issue 326.

INCOMING

Six big releases headed to a format near you...

01 

Dragon Ball FighterZ
Format PS4, XO, PC
Out 26 January

02 

Monster Hunter: World
Format PS4, XO, PC
Out 26 January

03 

Dissidia Final Fantasy NT
Format PS4
Out 30 January

04 

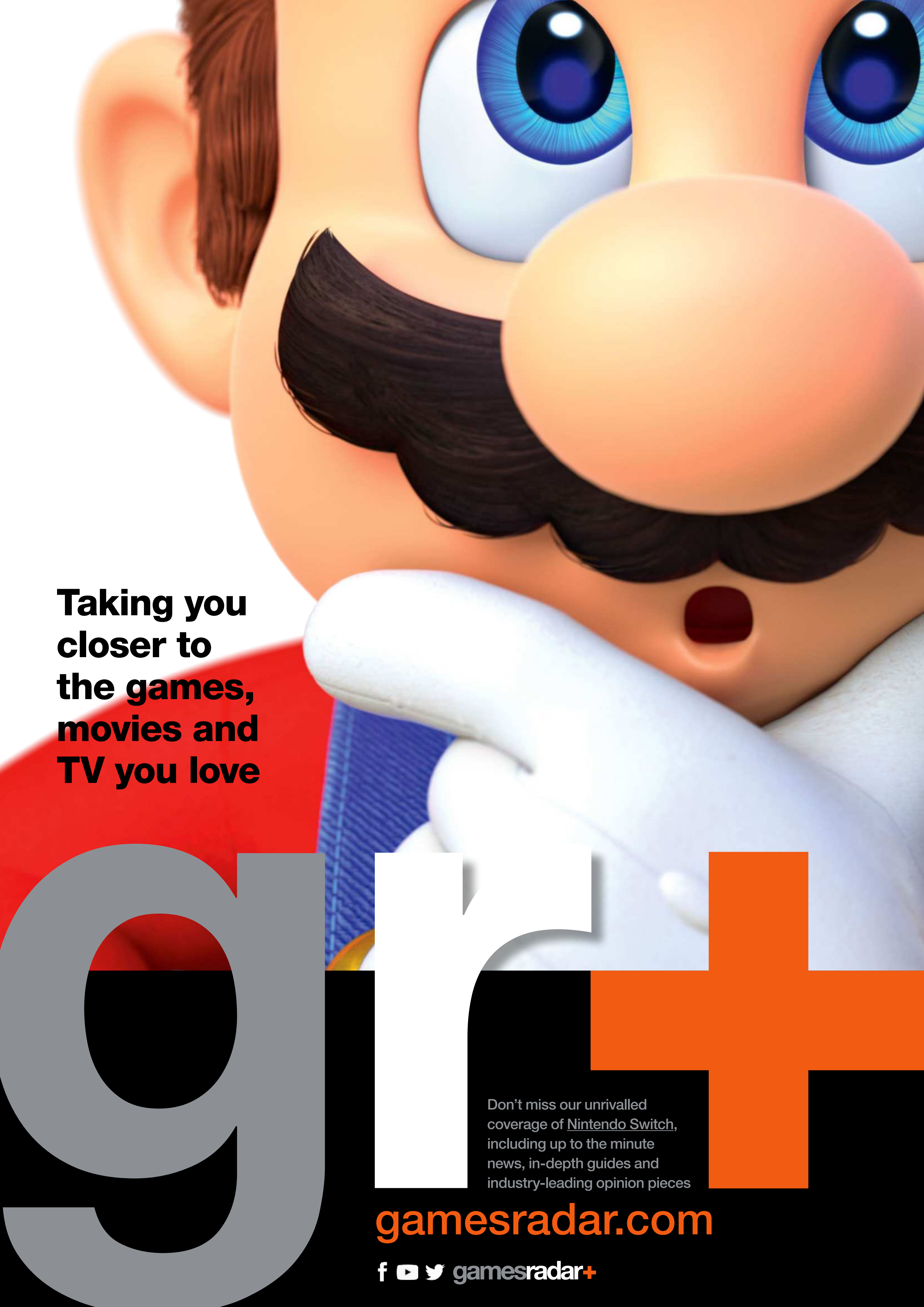
UFC 3
Format PS4, XO
Out 2 February

05 

Monster Energy Supercross
Format Switch, PS4, XO
Out 3 February

06 

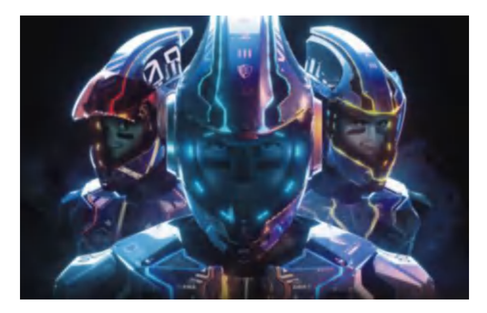
Metal Gear Survive
Format PS4, XO, PC
Out 20 February



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GM
Feature
On The Cover!
100
GREATEST
GAMES OF
2018
AND BEYOND!
Behold our (unranked) list of the most exciting upcoming titles – dive in for an overload of new gaming goodness!



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** 505 Games
Developer Roll7 **ETA** Autumn 2018

LASER LEAGUE

The sport where you laser round

01 If you like indie-developed future sports with names that end in 'League', you're in luck, because a second, non-rocket-powered game is coming your way! Developed by the people behind the acclaimed OlliOlli and Not A Hero, this promises to be a hectic and addictive multiplayer time sink. We've tried an early build, and even at this stage think it looks like couchplay gold.

Two teams of up to four players each (with or without AI) fight for control of nodes in Tron-like arenas Destroy your opponents with lasers, but don't get frazzled yourself!

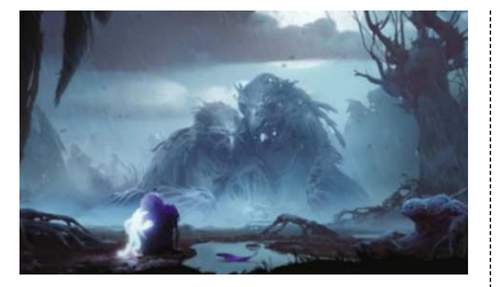


Format PS4 **Pub** Sony **Dev** Bend Studio **ETA** Winter 2018

DAYS GONE

Don't past this one up

02 This post-apocalyptic open-world game has taken ingredients from some of the best of its peers; and the resulting gaming casserole is looking very tasty. You'll scavenge and fight, and ride around a gorgeous world of caves and mountains on a motorbike. With humans and zombie-like 'Freakers' to worry about, you'll want to make liberal use of the crafting system, and you'll need to work out when being sneaky is a better option than launching a full-on assault. How many days need to be gone before we can have a go?



Format XO, PC **Publisher** Microsoft
Developer Moon Studios **ETA** Autumn 2018

ORI AND THE WILL OF THE WISPS

Too late now to say Ori?

03 Nothing to do with the cartoon featuring Kenneth Williams, sadly; but, even better, it's a sequel to the first sumptuous Ori game. Looking to be *at least* as gorgeous as its prequel, if not more so, we'll once again explore the forest of Nibel, which almost means it'll be one of the best platformers of 2018 by default. We'll eventually reveal "Ori's true destiny". Will this be the last adventure?

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Deep Silver
Developer 4A Games **ETA** Winter 2018

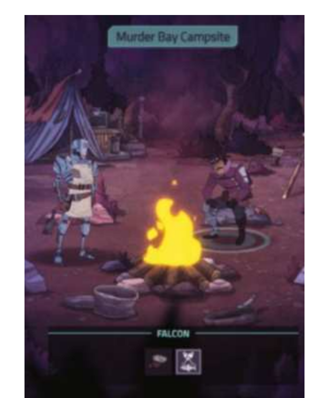
METRO EXODUS

Ill Metro by Moonlight



04 The first two Metro games were pretty darn good, and we've been looking forward to the third one since it was announced. We'll be stepping into lead character Artyom's dusty (and probably quite stinky by now) boots once again, but this time staying in the Metro isn't an option. We've got to go... outside.

Although things are still reassuringly familiar – FPS action mixed with elements of survival horror – being forced to flee the underground means we get some open-world-style levels as well as more traditional linear ones. With expanded weapon customisation in there too, could this be the best Metro yet?



Format PC **Publisher** Klei Entertainment
Developer Klei Entertainment **ETA** Spring 2018

GRIFTLANDS

How to betray friends and influence people

05 When a game describes itself as "an RPG where everything is negotiable", you might be forgiven for imagining a certain type of visual novel. This, however, really is an RPG. One with a superb cartoon-style art, evocative locations, and a giant snail with legs that has haunted our nightmares since we first caught sight of it in the trailer.

There's the turn-based combat that you'd normally expect, but it takes place in a world where you're encouraged to make a profit by any means you can (you can even turn in your mates for a bounty if you choose); yet this is also a world where NPCs will react to – and remember – your actions. Better hope that pal doesn't hold a grudge.



Format PC **Pub** Klei Entertainment
Dev Klei Entertainment **ETA** Autumn 2018

OXYGEN NOT INCLUDED

We need some space (colonists)

06 Currently sitting in Steam Early Access, we expect this to be officially let out into the wild in late 2018. Space is cool, colony/town management sims are cool... so a space colony management sim has *got* to be cool!

Our intrepid Early Access reporter found it a great challenge, too, despite its simple appearance. Your fussy little colonists don't want to die, and keeping the tykes alive means providing them with oxygen, food, water, warmth, power, and much more. You don't really want them getting ill, either – if only because there's nothing worse than having sick all over your shiny new space colony.

Format Switch **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **ETA** Summer 2019

METROID PRIME 4

Exciting adventures, Samus usual

07 A new first-person Samus adventure? One on Switch no less, allowing us to solve puzzles and shoot aliens on the go? Yes please! It's a shame Nintendo is being somewhat stingy with the details so far, but the knowledge that Metroid Prime 4 is in development gives us a warm, fuzzy feeling inside.

We're promised a brand-new storyline which neatly ties all events in the Prime universe together. With Kensuke Tanabe – producer of each previous game in the series – heading up a brand-new team, expect great things to be revealed in time.

GM Feature

On The Cover!

Arthur Morgan is a total jerk in the second trailer. Anyone missing lovely, sympathetic old John Marston about now?

Format PS4, XO **Publisher** Rockstar Games **Developer** Rockstar San Diego **ETA** Spring 2018

RED DEAD REDEMPTION II

Open-world epic lays down the outlaw



08

If Rockstar's Wild West sandbox isn't the best title of 2018, we'll eat a deep-fried set of spurs. All right, we clearly won't... but there's no denying this lushly detailed frontier epic already looks like being the game for all the others to beat.

It's been six years since we jumped in the sombre saddle with John Marston, and clearly the technology Rockstar San Diego can drawn on is a colossal leap ahead of what was available back in 2010 – and the dev's made full use of it. This sequel's landscape looks nothing short of astounding. Sun-baked prairies bristling with dry-looking grasses, valleys dotted with intricately rendered ferns, humid plantations, rough and ready, Deadwood-esque towns; they all combine to create a drool-worthy depiction of America's heartland, circa 1890.

Well, we say that date, but Rockstar hasn't actually confirmed the precise year Red Dead Redemption II is set. Still, judging by some noticeably younger returning characters – like a fresh-faced Dutch van der Linde – it looks all but certain this game is a prequel. Seeing as the original primarily took place in 1911, it seems reasonable to suggest Redemption II is set some time between 1890 and 1905.

While we've been given a brief a peek at new, not especially pleasant, lead character Arthur Morgan, it's unclear what sort of missions the old-timey bounty hunter will take part in. But if Rockstar gives us train robberies on a par with GTA V's heists, RDR II is going to be bloody hard to beat.









Hunting appears to be back with a vengeance. A good thing, too, because chasing down varmints last time out was a hoot.



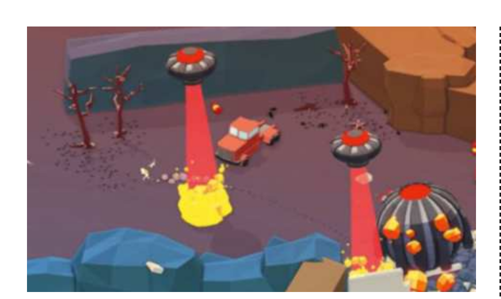


Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** EA **Dev** Hazelight Studios **ETA** Summer 2018

A WAY OUT

A tale of two felons

09 Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons developer Josef Fares returns with another tale of co-operation and mystery, but with a decidedly grittier twist. In this co-op-only game, two players (playing locally or online) take control of Vincent and Leo, a pair of convicted felons out for revenge, but sadly inconvenienced by the whole 'locked in prison' thing. A Way Out promises a slick jail-break adventure with some real narrative chops and a wide variety of Shawshank-esque escapades. At last, our Raquel Welch poster comes in handy!



Format PC **Publisher** Team17
Developer Reinkout Games **ETA** Autumn 2018

MUGSTERS

Under thresher

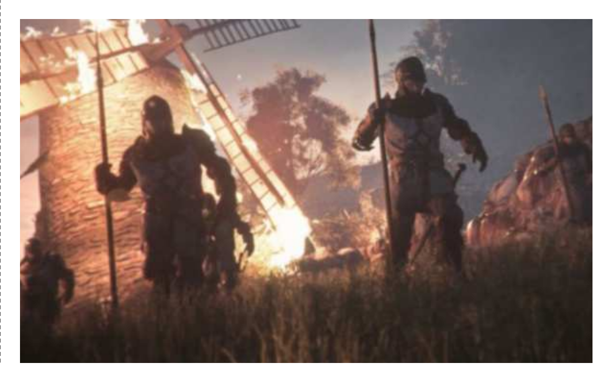
10 Chaos reigns in this hyper-coloured action-puzzle game from Reinkout Games. Fight off the alien invaders, alone or with a local friend, and maybe get yourself killed umpteen times along the way. Drive, thresh, crush, explode, and other verbs your way through a fast-paced physics sandbox full of squishable enemies, devilish traps – including an abduction ray – and a wonderfully bizarre array of vehicles (don't think we don't see you hiding there, combine harvester, you have our attention). Your mission: to rescue other survivors and save the world. Mugsters looks great, with an '80s throwback colour palette and crisp geometric models, and is just crazy, simple fun.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Focus Home Interactive
Developer Asobo Studio **ETA** Autumn 2018

A PLAGUE TALE: INNOCENCE

Rat's all folks

11 Asobo Studio has long been a hidden workhorse of the games industry, working on nearly two dozen titles over nearly 16 years, to little wider recognition. That might change now, though, as the French developer puts a strong foot forward into the indie scene with A Plague Tale: Innocence. This historically-inspired action-adventure game sees a pair of medieval French children, whose parents have been taken by the Inquisition, evading chittering hordes of supernatural rats, which strip the flesh from the bone quicker than… well, a smaller number of rats. The stunning visual design and icky atmosphere seen so far has us excited to see more!





Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Ubisoft **Dev** Ubisoft Montreal, SpectreVision **ETA** June 2018

TRANSFERENCE

Ghost in the machine

12 Designed to bridge the gap between films and games, Transference is… uh, well, pretty trippy, right? The recent surge of virtual reality tech has really opened up a gap in the market for interesting, experimental projects, and Transference looks primed and ready to fill that niche and then some.

Coming to us from Ubisoft and SpectreVision (the latter courtesy of Elijah Wood, actor and Hobbit extraordinaire), this story-driven VR experience is centred around a fictional piece of experimental technology that allows the player to explore the memories of PTSD sufferers, and sees you projected into their consciousnesses. With the stated goal of leaving players "unsettled", Transference is sure to be a must for VR owners looking for new experiences.

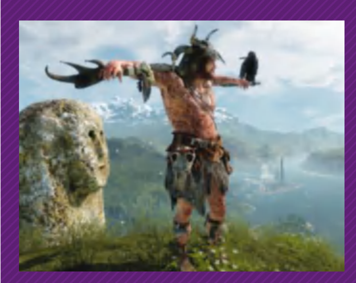
Format PS4 **Pub** Sony
Dev Wild Sheep Studio **ETA** Summer 2019

WILD

Walk on the… never mind

13 We've been waiting for Wild for a long time indeed. Development was announced in 2014, but since 2015 we've heard nothing more about it. Early in 2017, however, Michel Ancel, cult-classic machine and lead mind behind indie studio and Wild developer Wild Sheep, breathed new hype into the train with a teaser post suggesting that there's life in the old beast yet, and that was all we needed to know.

With the recent success of other online open-world experiences like Ark: Survival Evolved and Player Unknown's Battlegrounds, the delay might well ensure that it's dropped into a market hungry for similar titles. Set in a mythical version of prehistoric earth, Wild features procedurally generated open-world survival, online play, interactions with strange folkloric beings who unlock your shamanic powers, and making friends with bears and wolves (everyone's favourite adorably deadly compaions). No word is out on what release date Wild is currently aiming for, but we're guessing at this point it'll likely be a 2019 release. The wait is driving us… potty.





Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Ivory Tower **ETA** 16 March 2018

THE CREW 2

Planes, ships, and automobiles

14 In 2014, after months of hype, The Crew descended from on high. Promising revolutionary open-world gameplay and cutting edge racing mechanics, The Crew was... pretty good! Right? It was pretty good, right?

Okay, so we can all agree that something was missing, and The Crew 2 might just have found that certain something. The major gameplay shake-ups include the addition of planes and boats to the existing cars and, more excitingly, the ability to instantly switch between the three on the fly. Launch off a ramp in your hot rod, instantly transmogrify into a soaring jet, then dive down into a river, changing into a speedboat just in time to start shredding waves. Why is this happening? How? Who cares? Trust us, just roll with it, It's completely awesome.

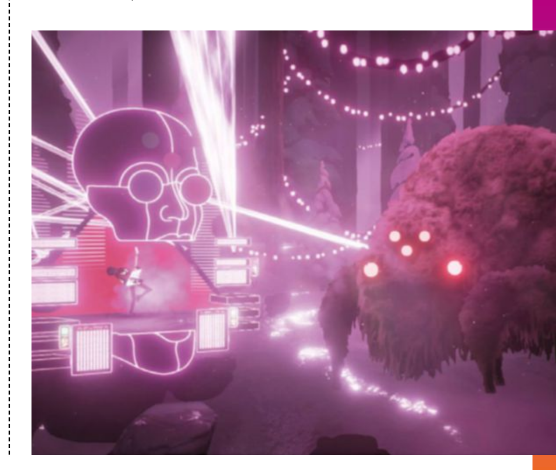
Pulling back on the strong narrative focus of the first Crew in favour of greater open-world freedom, driving challenges, and online interactions is the right move, and definitely serves the whole conceit of a free-wheeling online driving game far better. Maybe this isn't one for racing purists, but it's definitely shaping up to be one hell of a fun ride. Flight. Sail. You know.

Format XO, PC **Publisher** Annapurna Interactive
Developer Beethoven & Dinosaur **ETA** Autumn 2018

THE ARTFUL ESCAPE OF FRANCIS VENDETTI

Francis played guitar

15 Artful Escape looks like the sort of game you'd get if Pink Floyd decided to write Comfortably Numb in Unreal Engine 4. It's like Ziggy Stardust was cast as the main character of Mario Galaxy. It's like Jimi Hendrix joined his plucky sidekick Eric "Tails" Clapton on an adventure across Robotropolis. Basically, this platformer, which sees guitarist Francis looking to develop his own style and escape a famous relative's musical legend, looks pretty goddamn awesome. There's no official release date yet, but we're hoping that "when it's damn ready" means 2018!





Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Sucker Punch **ETA** Winter 2018

GHOST OF TSUSHIMA

Haunted house of the rising sun

16 We all love Infamous here, but we've been anxious to see what talented studio Sucker Punch Productions can cook up for us in the way of new IP. Boy, the studio has not disappointed. Ghost Of Tsushima made a splash at Paris Games Week with a stunning announcement trailer, depicting the struggles of a samurai fighting the Mongol hordes in 13th-century feudal Japan.

Based on the real-life invasion of the island halfway between Japan and Korea, and inspired by a wealth of stories and films about the Japanese warriors, Ghost nails the intense dramatic style of the samurai adventure genre. We haven't seen much in the way of gameplay yet, but based on snippets of footage, the way a ninja-style outfit replaces the main character's intricate armour, and the whole 'Ghost' thing, it looks to be an open-world stealth-action experience. (Though could that armour change hint at a Delsin Rowe-style evolution according to your playstyle?) If the game itself is anything like the epic announce trailer, we're in for something special.

There's no word yet of a release date, and based on the limited amount of footage released so far the game is still early in development, but we're hoping for a late 2018 release. Let's not rush them, for if you only think of yourself, you'll only destroy yourself...



Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Insomniac Games **ETA** Summer 2018

SPIDER-MAN

The only negative is the bad guy

17 Spider-Man is one of our favourite superheroes. Sure, he has trouble getting out of the bathtub, and he won't go into a baddie's evil lair if they leave conkers around the place; but his wisecracks and athletic combat make him ideal for videogames. Plus there's a small chance we made up the stuff about the bath and the conkers.

What Insomniac has shown of its PS4 exclusive so far is very, very promising. Dynamic web-slinging combat, huge cinematic setpieces, iconic villains… we'll have a piece of *that* arachnid action. It looks like we might just get to face off against both Kingpin and Norman Osborn, as well as Shocker. We're intrigued to discover what the Peter Parker and Mary Jane gameplay sections involve and, on top of that, what sort of roles Miles Morales plays. Could we be given two different Spider-Men to play as…?

The main bad guy is Mister Negative, a lesser-known but fascinating villain. With access to advanced tech, mental domination, super strength, and electrical powers, he's one tough cookie. The 'Devil's Breath' mentioned in the Paris Games Week trailer is of his devising, and first appeared in the 'Brand New Day' storyline of the comics. In print at least, it's a bioweapon in gas form that targets specific DNA. Whatever its implementation in the new game turns out to be, we're willing to bet ol' Spidey is not going to have an easy time of it. We wouldn't have it any other way.



Format Switch **Publisher** Nintendo
Developer HAL Laboratory **ETA** Spring 2018

KIRBY STAR ALLIES

Kirby or not Kirby?

18 Kirby on Switch. It's really happening! The cutest devourer of souls you'll ever see returns with a new platform adventure, one that allows up to four people to play together. The signature copy abilities are still present and correct (Fire, Water, and Sword are among those confirmed) but this time you'll also be able to recruit enemies by hitting them with magical hearts. The very thought fills us with Joy-Con.





Format Switch **Publisher** Nintendo
Developer Good-Feel **ETA** Summer 2018

YOSHI

This just might be dino might

19 The little dino's come a long way. Woolly World left the Mario brothers behind, and Yoshi's new adventure offers another new aesthetic. There's a LittleBigPlanet-esque feel to the design; a world of bright colours and cardboard constructs. You'll make your way through side-scrolling levels, killing enemies and swallowing them for egg production (in a dubious interpretation of biology). Certain elements of each stage can be flipped or opened, allowing you to progress – or discover the hidden path available in each level.

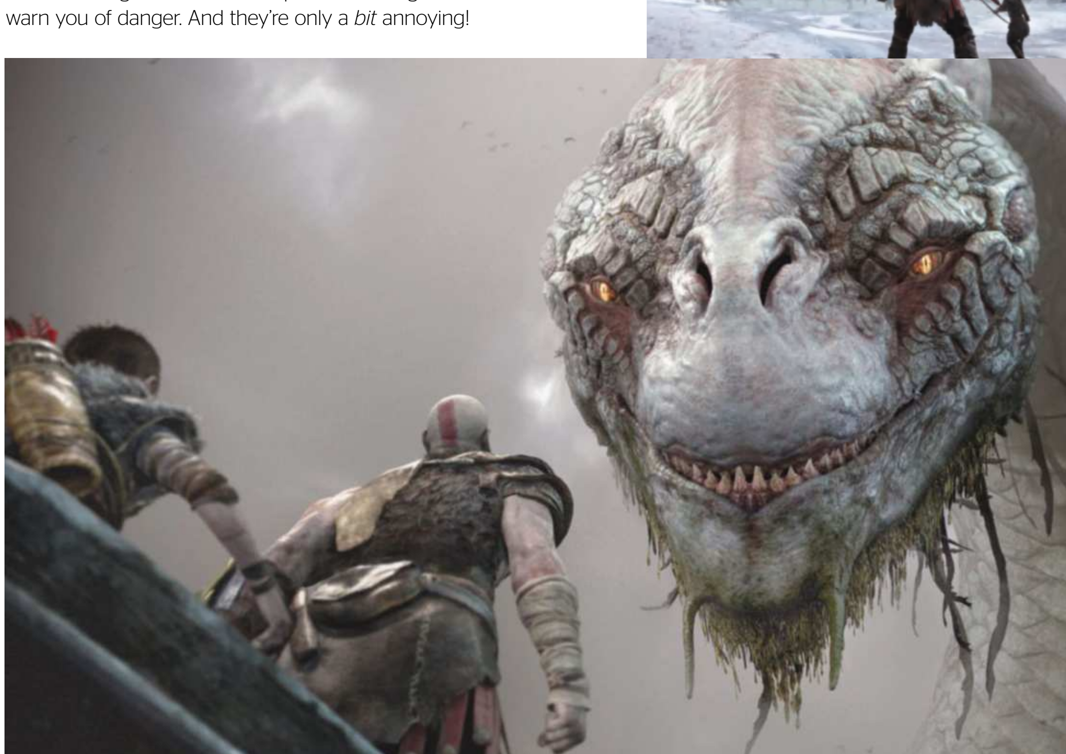
Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony
Developer Sony **ETA** Spring 2018

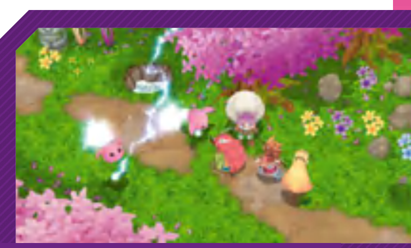
GOD OF WAR

You can lead a Norse to warfare...

20 From what we've seen so far, Kratos's next adventure is going to be a darn good way of getting your digitised violence fix. The move from Greek to Norse mythology, with surroundings to match, hasn't dampened the bald bruiser's anger... or our interest.

With typically brilliant graphics and superb monster designs, it's a joy to look at. The magic ice axe – and fighting alongside son Atreus – suggest it could be just as impressive to play. Atreus is in awe of his dad, though that doesn't stop him throwing out combat barks to warn you of danger. And they're only a *bit* annoying!





Format PS4, PC, PS Vita **Pub** Square Enix
Dev Square Enix **ETA** 15 February 2018

SECRET OF MANA

I thought I sword a Rabite Cap

21 If you missed the initial SNES release of this classic RPG, there are a few ways to play it today. You could have a go at it on the SNES Mini if you've been lucky enough to nab one, or there's a mobile port if you're up for it, but pretty soon, we'll all be able to enjoy a full-on remake. A great big dose of classic 20th-century gameplay with 21st-century prettiness.

Promising to reintroduce some retro magic to our lives, Randi, Primm, and Popoi enjoy an updated soundtrack, and completely revamped, fully 3D graphics. Not to mention voices! Recognisably the same much-loved game as before, this is one to watch.

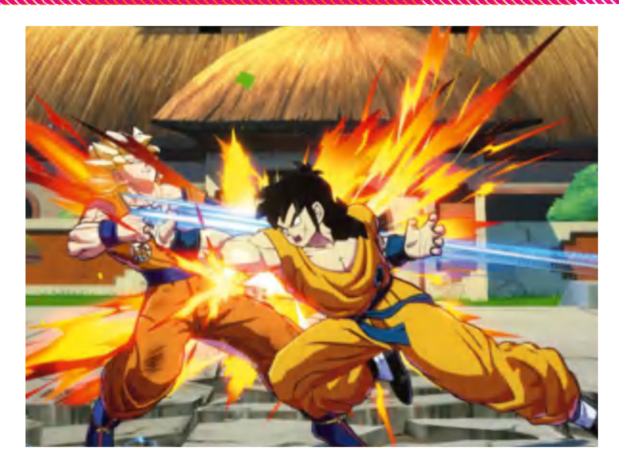
Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Plug In Digital
Dev Hollow Tree Games **ETA** Spring 2018

SHAPE OF THE WORLD

It's shaping up nicely

22 This is a golden age for indie games, and Hollow Tree Games' debut has the potential to be one of 2018's very best. The art style puts us in mind of Proteus, and the experience itself is similarly relaxed and encouraging of exploration. There are no enemies, and no time limit. But there *are* flying whales. It sounds great already, right?

The music and the procedural world itself will react to the path you take, and there are many mysterious creatures to see and play with. Interestingly, despite the random elements and lack of urgency, there *is* an ending to reach.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Bandai Namco
Developer Arc System Works **ETA** 26 January 2018

DRAGON BALL FIGHTERZ

Super Saiyan Brothers

23 This adaptation of the beloved anime is looking like the most beautiful fighting game ever made. Arc System Works pioneered the same cel-shaded technique in Guilty Gear Xrd, turning Goku and the gang into a playable cartoon rivalled only by Cuphead. The possibilities of 3v3 tag-teaming and seven super gauges look daunting, but an option for simplified auto-combos and in-depth story mode made up of three different arcs shows there's a meaty package to serve DBZ fans, and not just the most technically proficient in the fighting genre.

Format PS4, PC **Publisher** Deep Silver
Developer Ys Net **ETA** Winter 2018

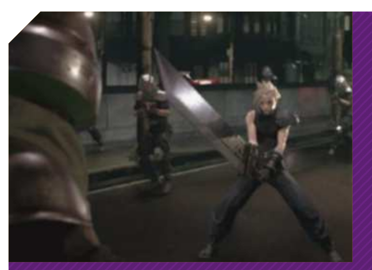
SHENMUE III

Kept Ryo waiting, huh?

24 Another delay to the long-awaited sequel means we'll have been waiting to find out what happened after Shenmue II for going on 17 years. Nonetheless, a publishing deal with Deep Silver is a promising sign, as is new development footage showing the mileage Yu Suzuki's team is getting from Unreal Engine 4 to dispel doubts from that Gamescom trailer.

While a photo-realistic open world looks impossible for a Kickstarter-funded project, just being able to finally continue Ryo's quest has us on tenterhooks. If they can find an excuse to sneak in a forklift, all the better.





Format PS4 **Pub** Square Enix
Dev Square Enix **ETA** Winter 2018

FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE

Cloud's on the horizon

26 There's a lot of love for Noctis and his bros at the moment but we haven't forgotten your promises, Square Enix. Since the surprise announcement at E3 2015 that a full-blown FFVII remake was real and happening, we've had a snippet of footage featuring gorgeous cutscenes and a fully rendered Cloud swinging his big sword in real-time combat, but little else.

News that Square Enix had only taken development back in-house since summer, having previously partnered with external studio CyberConnect2, suggests we still have a while to wait to complete the whole story. But with the decision to retell the classic story in episodic releases, there's still high hopes we'll set foot in Midgar next year.





Format Switch, PS4, XO **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Sega **ETA** Autumn 2018

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES 4

Rise of the valkyries

25 Valkyria Chronicles was underrated when it first launched on PS3 almost a decade ago, depicting a fictional version of Europe during WWII with a sweeping story that was both charming and compassionate about its subject matter. A tragedy, then, that the PSP sequels never released outside of Japan, while the latest spin-off, Revolution, changed everything for the worse.

So it's a welcome relief that for its forthcoming instalment Sega has followed Activision's cue and gone back to WWII – if WWII was an anime. Not only does it bring back the brilliant BLiTZ (Battle of Live Tactical Zones) battle system, a fusion of turn-based strategy and third-person shooter, but the story also takes place in the same time frame as the original game, as we follow Armored Ranger Battalion Squad E in their fight against the Imperial army during the bleakest and most bitter of winters.

This more grounded return to the series' roots is another reason why Sega will be bringing Valkyria Chronicles 4 to the West. The game is apparently 90% complete, with a PS4 release set for March in Japan, but while we wait for localisation, a remaster for Xbox One and Switch players to catch up on the series for the first time would be a no-brainer.

Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Square Enix
Dev Tokyo RPG Factory **ETA** 23 January 2018

LOST SPHEAR

Remember me?

27 Despite it not being an actual sequel to I Am Setsuna, the latest nostalgic production from Tokyo RPG Factory does what a sequel should: it improves on what's gone before. Turn-based battles now factor in character placement and momentum; environments are more varied; and mech suits do battle!

January might look packed for JRPG fans, but Lost Sphear, where you use your memory to rescue a world that's being forgotten, is shaping up to be one of Square Enix's mid-tier, memorable highlights.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Bandai Namco
Dev Bandai Namco Studios **ETA** Summer 2018

CODE VEIN

Just pump it into my veins!

28 Comparing games to Dark Souls should really be a sin, but while From Software remains silent over what it plans to do next, Bandai Namco's own vampiric effort to fill the gap may just be the game to satiate our appetite for deep, merciless combat.

The anime visuals drip with bold gothic style reminiscent of Bloodborne, while your Revenant demon slayer is also fully customisable. Although there's no word on online play, AI-controlled companions will be on hand to lend us a hand, and even revive us. After spending years preparing to die, we can do with a leg up.



Format PS4, XO, **Publisher** Square Enix
Developer Square Enix **ETA** Summer 2018

KINGDOM HEARTS III

Enough Goofing around

29 We've had the HD re-releases, the remixes, the prologues, but by Mickey, we will finally get Kingdom Hearts III in 2018! That much was confirmed the last time Square Enix shared gameplay of the action RPG, which had Sora, Goofy, and Donald Duck turning up in the world of Toy Story featuring Woody, Buzz, and the rest of Andy's toy collection. As you'd expect, it's a feast for the eyes now that games are at visual parity with Pixar films. The long-awaited sequel will also include worlds inspired by the films Tangled and Big Hero 6, as well as summon attacks based on Disney theme park rides.





Format PS4, PC **Publisher** Bandai Namco **Developer** Level-5 **ETA** 19 January 2018

NI NO KUNI II: REVENANT KINGDOM

Ding Dong Dell-ighted to see you again



Out of the frying pan of the holiday rush and into the January Japanese fire, Level-5's JRPG sequel faces stiff competition, but its Ghibli-inspired world deserves attention, while Hayao Miyazaki's regular collaborator Joe Hisaishi is back on scoring duties. This time the fantasy world takes centre stage, as you step into the shoes of exiled cat prince Evan. The battle system has also been overhauled, with real-time melee combat, and the new ability to summon the help of Pikmin-like beings called Higgledies.

Format Switch, PC **Pub** Square Enix
Dev Square Enix **ETA** Summer 2018

DRAGON QUEST BUILDERS 2

Can we build it? Yes we can!

31 Dragon Quest Builders might have seemed like a blatant Minecraft rip-off, yet it added JRPG charm and a proper structured story for gamers daunted by the otherwise open freedom of Mojang's sandbox builder. The sequel builds on the original with new ways to explore what look like even larger worlds, including dashing, swimming and, taking a leaf from Breath of the Wild, even gliding. Multiplayer is also included this time so you can build with friends. Apart from its initial reveal, we don't know when we'll see this in 2018, but as Switch is getting in on the action too, Square Enix will also be releasing the first game on the system in the meantime.

Format Switch **Pub** Marvelous Entertainment
Dev Grasshopper **ETA** Winter 2018

TRAVIS STRIKES AGAIN: NO MORE HEROES

Looking fresher than ever

32 Not content with platitudes about supporting Switch, Japan's games maverick Suda51 has kept his word, and gaming's favourite loser rides again! But rather than another hack-and-slash follow-up, the conceit is that Travis gets warped into a demonic games console where you'll traverse six different retro-style games, while its trademark visual style will play out in cutscenes in-between.

With Hotline Miami and Shovel Knight already cited as influences, and apparently completely playable on a single Joy-Con, suggesting multiplayer is highly likely, this could well be Suda51's riotous tribute to the indie scene, with the Travis touch.

This young women looks like Ellie, no? Many think she's actually the sweary teen's mother, appearing in flashback.

Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Naughty Dog **ETA** Winter 2019

THE LAST OF US PART II

Savage sequel is PS4's murderous MVP

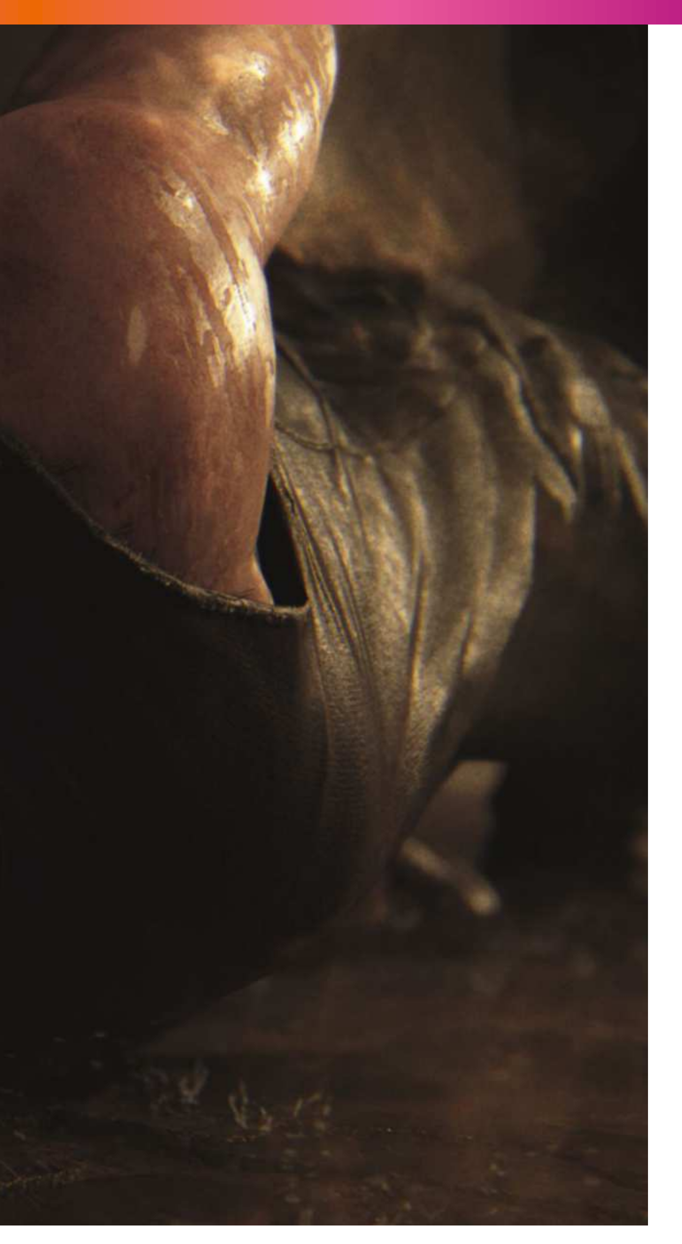
33 Say hello to the Most Depressing Sequel Ever. Naughty Dog's hugely anticipated follow-up will undoubtedly be a masterfully paced adventure, carefully balancing tense, cat-and-mouse stealth with unflinching shootouts. Still, we're already absolutely certain it won't be the cheeriest game you're going to play in 2018.

The Last Of Us Part II's early footage suggests an even more savage experience than Joel and Ellie's original apocalypse adventure. Moody guitar solos echoing around rooms full of messily slaughtered dudes. Brutal, stomach-turning depictions of violence against women. Creepy cultists who have no qualms about breaking arms to obtain intel. Hope's always been sparse in this post-apocalyptic world, but it appears to be at a premium in this sequel.

While concrete story details are thin on the ground, Ellie is clearly several years older than the last time we saw her; she appears to be at least 18 or 19, possibly even in her early 20s. As for Joel, we've yet to get a good glimpse at the grizzled Texan. The way the camera tracks him in the first trailer is oddly ghostly though, leading some fans of the series to speculate he's actually dead, and Ellie's grief-stricken mind has cooked him up.

There's also a line of thinking that says TLOU Part II is set in Seattle, after fans noticed similarities between the game's concept art and the Washington-based burg. Jet City or not, this is PS4's most exciting upcoming exclusive.







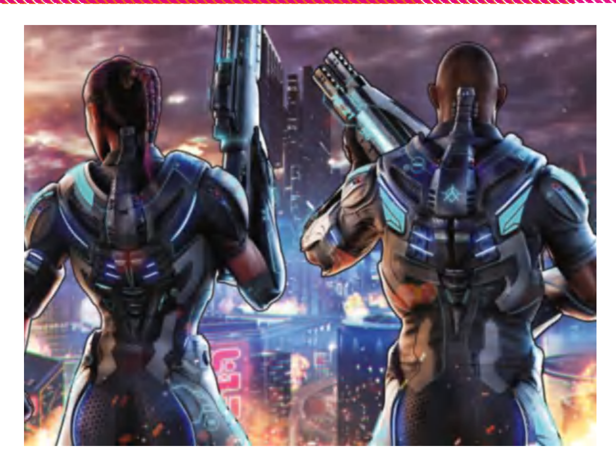




Look closely into yonder darkness, and you can make out the grotesque, mushroom-shaped head of a Clicker. Hold us.







Format XO **Publisher** Microsoft
Developer Sumo Digital **ETA** Spring 2018

CRACKDOWN 3

Good work, agent

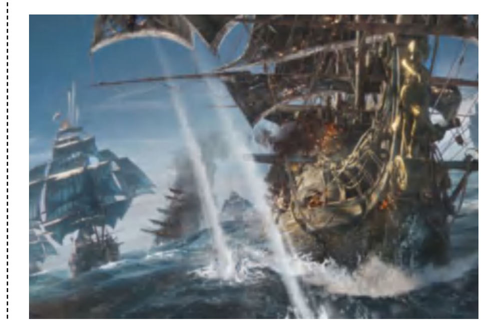
34 Seven years on from the last crime-punishing action sandbox, you play a superpowered agent tasked with cleaning up a new-look Pacific City – in particular, you're taking on those responsible for unleashing elemental warfare on the futuristic metropolis. During the single-player campaign you'll deploy new weapons such as a singularity gun and gatling missile launcher, and lure gang captains from their hideouts by targeting their street soldiers, but it's in ten-agent multiplayer where the action really gets interesting. Here, Microsoft's cloud technology powers a top-to-bottom destructible city. Yes, we'll be able to take down *entire buildings* – surely a target no-one can miss?

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft **ETA** Autumn 2018

SKULL & BONES

A jolly roger good time

35 Ubisoft's pirate-battler features all of the 'avast, matey!' with none of the 'captain, my foot's stuck in the rigging'. You'll attack merchant vessels, plunder their haul, and make off with it before the sea police catch you. The flagship gametype is 5v5 competitive mode Loot Hunt, in which teams compete to nab the most gold from AI ships. Strategy comes from reading the wind and plotting a course through the maelstrom. You can predict movements and line up alongside rivals to exchange cannon fire, or cut through the smoke and ram hulls to splinters. For those who want to sail alone, there'll be a story-driven single-player campaign too. We've got ten doubloons on a guy with a black beard showing up.





Format PS4, PC **Pub** Devolver Digital
Dev Onebitbeyond **ETA** Spring 2018

THE SWORDS OF DITTO

Draw swords together

37 Deeds resonate in this beautifully illustrated co-op RPG. Whipping dungeon bosses triggers a golden age, but die and the world transitions into an era of darkness. Only by passing your heroic essence to new adventurers can you banish evil for good. Dying comes regularly but you've got an impressive arsenal to ward it off as long as possible, from vinyl records used as throwing stars to a massive foot that you can summon, Monty-Python-style, from the sky. This is a game so whimsical that in co-op you revive your fallen friend by hugging them. Aww! Thankfully you retain all XP even after dying, giving The Swords Of Ditto a lineage system not unlike the wonderful Rogue Legacy.



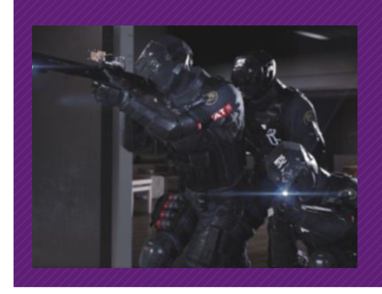


Format PS4 **Pub** Sony
Dev Quantic Dream **ETA** Summer 2018

DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN

Rise of the planet of the AI

38 A neo-noir thriller destined to stir controversy. In the latest footage, a semi-autonomous robot maid directed by the player has to intervene in child abuse. Detroit explores heavy issues with its multi-lead story: elsewhere, an android leads a machine revolution with obvious parallels to the civil rights struggle. It'll need a sensitive hand to prevent trivialising such complex topics. Graphically, though, there's no question of quality. New strides in wrinkle simulation and real-time skin translucency marry to a motion capture system allowing six actors to perform simultaneously. The results, at least from a cinematic perspective, are wholly authentic.



Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Sony, Team Ico **ETA** 7 February 2018

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

The heavyweight champion returns

36 Sixteen colossi roam the land, peacefully going about their business and hurting nobody. Are you going to let that stand? Of course not! Your aim in this ground-up remake of the 2005 PS2 classic is to seek them out and end their lives.

Each colossus forms a living, breathing platform stage that you navigate by holding R2 to cling onto their fur and taking each ridge, tuft, and fold as it comes. They're still as massive as ever, whether flying, swimming, or galloping through a massive seamless environment, but the way in which you tackle them has been brought in line with modern expectations, with tighter player and camera controls alleviating the original's clunk.

It's the visuals that impress most about this remake, though. From your steed's mane parting in the wind, to sunlight breaking through thick forest, they elevate already stunning artistic direction so effectively that there's nothing to indicate this was ever a PS2 game. It's going to make us cry all over again.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Fatshark
Developer Fatshark **ETA** Spring 2018

VERMINTIDE 2

Tail as old as time

39 Four-player co-op mixing frenzied melee combat and an addictive loot system. What's not to like? Well, apart from all the Skaven. What your ratman enemies lack in cleanliness, they make up for in being a great deal of fun to mangle with spears, crossbows, and fire bombs. And as the ratty nasties are joining forces with the more brutish Chaos army, there are now more foes to bloody up as you explore Warhammer's fortress city, Helmgart. So pick one of five heroes with 15 possible careers (each career coming with unique appearances, talents, and weapons), because if you don't save the Empire from devastation there are going to be droppings *everywhere*.



Format PC **Publisher** Crytek
Developer Crytek **ETA** Autumn 2018

HUNT: SHOWDOWN

The most dangerous game

40 Fusing survival horror scares into a competitive match-based format, you'll face off against other players in an effort to claim bounties across dark corners of the world. Playable alone or in a pair, you'll go after barn-dwelling spiders and bee-spewing hermits, then escape with the winnings. That's if you can resist taking a risk and targeting other teams to steal their loot, and survive their attempts to do the same to you. Be warned: death is permanent. The individual or team with the most bounty at the end wins – if indeed there's anyone left standing. *So many spiders...*



Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Maxim Games **Dev** Iron Galaxy **ETA** 31 March 2018

EXTINCTION

Stomp and circumstance

41 In the red corner, at 150 feet tall: a race of evil ogres called the Ravenii! In the blue corner, at just shy of six feet and far less stinky: Avil! (That's you.) If this were a boxing match it would be a little lopsided, but luckily it's acrobatic real-time combat, and size means little when you can use a whip to latch onto buildings and soar through the air.

This free-form fighting system hinges on hacking apart giant pieces of armour to expose enemy weak points, such as an arm, then slicing it off. Felling the great beasts is a highlight: Avil separates heads from bodies with a bloody streak. During dust-ups, you also need to keep in mind townsfolk who need rescuing. It's going to feel disheartening to see homes crushed under a size 88 foot, but level up and you'll become a force to be reckoned with, size discrepancy or no.



Format PC **Pub** Phoenix Labs **Dev** Phoenix Labs **ETA** Summer 2018

DAUNTLESS

It's daunting going up against a classic

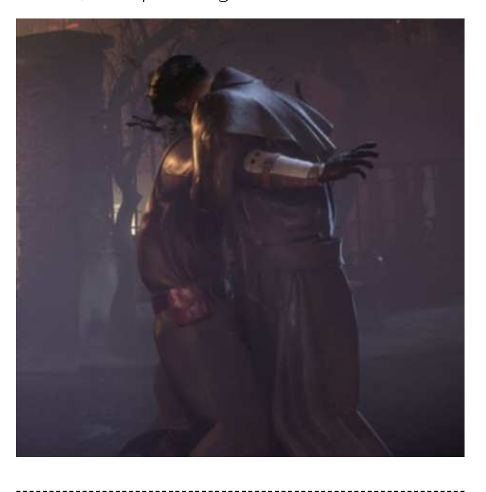
42 This free-to-play title is out to be an independent alternative to the Monster Hunter series. Like those games, this tasks you and a group of friends with taking on gigantic beasts, here called Behemoths, using a variety of outlandish weapons. You'll need to master the combat, and put some effort into learning the monsters' abilities and anticipating their moves, which can surprise – and squash – an unprepared group. If it borrows a premise and gameplay elements, its look is markedly different, with bright colours in a sparse, minimalist world. Dauntless will have microtransactions, but the developers want to limit this to cosmetic items only – you'll still have to grow your skills to succeed.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Focus Home Interactive
Developer Dontnod Entertainment **ETA** Spring 2018

VAMPYR

One vampire we hope doesn't suck

46 A dark action-RPG from the creators of the beloved Life Is Strange, Vampyr casts you as Jonathan Reid, a doctor in London in 1918, during the outbreak of the Spanish flu. Oh and he's a vampire. Choosing between upholding his Hippocratic oath and indulging his vampiric bloodlust is the core of the game's dilemmas. The developer has said the game will feature a world of distinct NPCs, and should you decide to feed on one, the effects of their death will ripple out into the world. Every life matters. Quite a departure from Life is Strange, to be sure, but a promising one nonetheless.

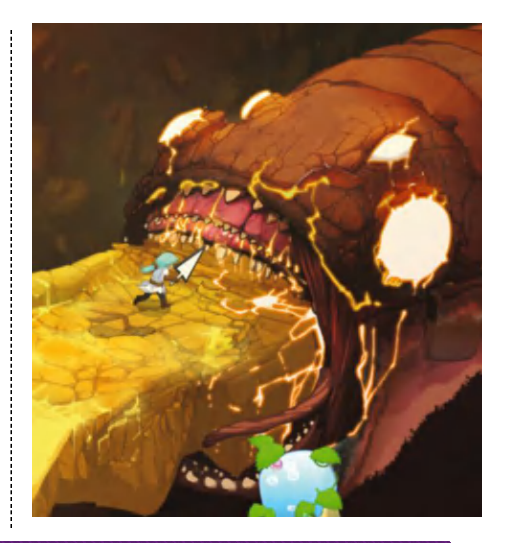


Format PC **Publisher** Playsaurus
Developer Playsaurus **ETA** Summer 2018

CLICKER HEROES 2

Kick back, relax and level up.

43 A sequel to 2014's Clicker Heroes, this is an 'idle game' – which is to say it can be set up to play itself while you're away. No matter what, your chosen hero will fight their way towards the top-right of the screen. You'll be choosing gear, levelling up, and picking skills, all to boost your hero's journey. The joy of these 'idle' or 'clicker' games is to be a relaxing, stress-free environment for players where you just pop in now and then to see a whole new location or boss. It's not for everyone, but for if you're seeking a more chilled-out adventure, this might be just the thing.



Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Team17
Developer Villa Gorilla **ETA** Summer 2018

YOKU'S ISLAND EXPRESS

First class

47 Described as an open-world pinball adventure, this charming little platformer oozes nothing but good vibes. You play as Yoku, a tiny courier who delivers packages around a bright, tropical island. You have to ensure parcels reach their recipients using combination of classic platforming, pinball, and physics (not the usual courier technique of punting them over fences). You'll be interacting with a cast of characters over multiple storylines, and can even unlock new skills by collecting hidden fruit (the best kind). With lush visuals and an easygoing atmosphere, this seems like the perfect game to relax with.



Format PS4 **Pub** Sony
Dev Media Molecule **ETA** Autumn 2018

DREAMS

If you build it, they will come.

44 This comes from the creators of Little Big Planet, and like that game Dreams seeks to emphasise user-created content – art, music, games, whatever you like. It will come with levels ready for play, in which you control an 'imp', a sort of cursor-pointer character, to manipulate objects to solve puzzles, but the meat of the game will be the levels, or 'dreams', the audience will create and share. This all sounds much like Little Big Planet but from the footage revealed so far, the possibilities seem much more varied and the tools to make levels much more robust. Player creativity is almost guaranteed to produce some darling content – and probably a few nightmares too... For fans of puzzles and making your own fun, this could be very special.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Konami
Dev Konami **ETA** 22 February 2018

METAL GEAR SURVIVE

Kojima may be gone but the series lives on

45 Taking the universe of Metal Gear and dropping in zombies and wave-based survival seems dreadfully uninspired but it's hard to deny that with MGSV's slick mechanics, there's a lot of promise. Especially when the game builds upon those possibilities to bring us four-player co-op, crafting, and even some light base construction. Co-op, in particular, has a lot of appeal, multiplying the options in any given scenario. At the very least, you'll find out whether your mates like you enough to defend you from the undead hordes, or will use you as a squishy distraction. MGSV was already incredibly feature-rich, so adding more to that certainly offers a lot in one package. Survive could end up being a welcome surprise for the series in Kojima's absence.

Format XO, PC **Publisher** Microsoft **Developer** Rare **ETA** Autumn 2018

SEA OF THIEVES

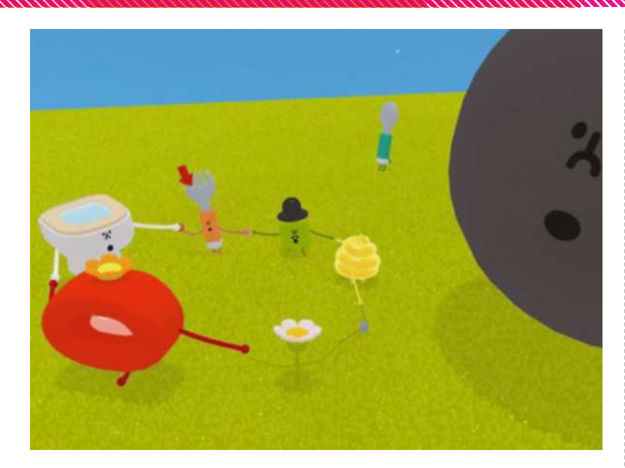
Nerves of steal



There have been a few games casting us as pirates on the high seas but certainly none like this co-op, open-world, treasure hunting adventure. You'll work with friends aboard your ship, each taking on a crucial role such as steering or navigation, taking to the seas in search of booty. You'll also have to contend with rival ships and crews, resulting in chaotic naval battles. Teamwork will be essential to any crew's success.

What makes Sea Of Thieves stand out is the simplicity of so many of its mechanics. Want to share a location with your crew? Hold up the map in-game and they can see what you do. It's that knack for intuitive design that makes it stand out, and makes it accessible to players of differing skill levels and interests (time to pressgang your little brother). The vibrant visuals certainly help too, keeping things feeling light and not at all serious.

This one has been long in the making but its promise of an unfettered pirate adventure with friends remains a tantalising prospect.



Format PS4, PC **Publisher** Annapurna
Developer Funomena **ETA** Summer 2018

WATTAM

Toy Story Damacy

49 It's been a rocky road for Wattam, the latest project from Katamari Damacy creator Keita Takahashi, having been dropped by Sony after being showcased as a PS4 exclusive in 2015. The bizarre befriend-'em-all about bringing anthropomorphic objects together to explore an ever-expanding fantasy world had a re-reveal of sorts in August 2017. Announcing new publisher Annapurna Interactive, Funomena unveiled a new trailer, added PC to the console release and let players in on a new "beefier" build. All involved are adamant we'll enjoy the oddness in 2018.

Format PC **Publisher** Mossmouth
Developer Mossmouth **ETA** Spring 2018

UFO 50

Definitely not Action 52

50 Creators of several of the most celebrated indie games of the last few years have got together for a NES-styled compilation. It contains 50 individually built titles, all sharing a 32-colour palette and 8-bit aesthetic. Some are riffs on classics, such as Kick Club, a variation on the original Bubble Bobble with the bubbles replaced by a football, while others are less recognisable. The one intentionally awful creation, Cyber Owl, alludes to the infamous Cheetahmen from notoriously poor NES compendium Action 52. With collaborators like Derek Yu and Eirik Suhrke, of Spelunky and Downwell fame respectively, this promises to be an improvement in overall design, but don't expect it to be much easier.



Format PS4 **Pub** Sony
Dev Flavourworks **ETA** Summer 2018

ERICA

Point-and-*ick!*

52 The debut game from London-based studio Flavourworks, Erica is an ambitious narrative-mystery about a woman seeking to find the truth about her traumatic childhood. Akin to 2015's Her Story, it's a point-and-click adventure made using live-action scenes to blur the lines between film and game. Sophia del Pizzo plays Erica, and you guide her as she tries to solve a murder that's somehow entwined with her own troubled past. Playtime should come in at around three hours, with a branching story about interpreting the truth hopefully encouraging replays. Creative director Jack Attridge has said the devs are aiming for a "movie-night-appeal." Going by the footage already available, this might just be worth sacrificing an evening at the local fleapit.

Format Switch, XO, PC **Pub** Chucklefish
Dev Chucklefish **ETA** Spring 2018

WARGROOVE

Sun and steel

53 If you've been waiting with bated breath since 2008 for a new Advance Wars, this will make you gasp. From the studio behind Starbound, Risk of Rain, and Stardew Valley, Wargroove is a 16-bit RTS game that merges tried-and-tested mechanics with contemporary polish. Including both multiplayer and single-player, the systems are designed with accessibility in mind, making getting started easy and cutting yourself off hard, but the really enticing part is the editor. The scenario creator lets you create and share your own multi-faceted campaigns with multiple outcomes. The grudges will know no bounds!



Format XO, PC **Publisher** Microsoft **Developer** Undead Labs **ETA** Spring 2018

STATE OF DECAY 2

Land of the dead

51 The first State Of Decay was a good game that did itself no favours. While players enjoyed the freedom the open-world survival horror title offered, the glitch-prone gameplay made investing time into it difficult. Despite this, Undead Labs managed to shamble into making a sequel, with full backing from Microsoft Studios to make its brand of the living dead as potent as possible.

Along with a generally improved appearance, this second outing boasts tighter action, more advanced skill trees and settlement building, and a more intuitive choice system for character interaction. The emphasis this time around, according to the team, is on developing the relationship between advancing the story, searching for essential supplies like ammo and medicine, and taking care of your base. Balancing that lot will become increasingly tricky, especially as the action will be affected by how your gang back home are doing day-to-day.

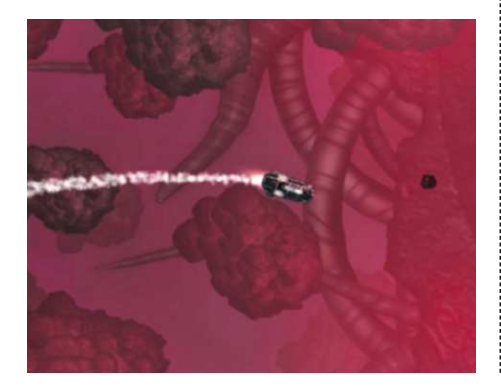
The lose-lose scenarios have increased, making choosing who lives and who dies even more unsettling. Certain skills, like Medic, are in short supply, and making the wrong choice could mean a world of pain later on. What's worse, you can now pick which member of your posse to play as, meaning you can't blame poor AI when your best gunner gets torn to pieces. It's all your fault now.

Format PC **Publisher** Failbetter
Developer Failbetter **ETA** Summer 2018

SUNLESS SKIES

For queen and colony

54 Already in Early Access, the sequel to Sunless Sea is slowly coming along with the same vigour as its predecessor. Across the vast cosmos, alien civilisations are being killed by a mysterious force. In their wake, the Queen is spreading her empire, colonising the High Wilderness (as it's known). As the captain of a vessel, you choose from a plethora of different character types and skillsets before steaming off to explore the stars, and perhaps do a bit of fighting. After each death, a new captain is appointed from your crew and you continue onward, creating your legacy as you go. A bit like Joss Whedon's Firefly, really, but with loads more dialogue and colonialism, and a lot less Nathan Fillion (none, to be exact).





Format Switch, PS4, XO **Publisher** Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft **ETA** Autumn 2018

STARLINK: BATTLE FOR ATLAS

Wing Commander: Skylanders Edition

55 To be fair to Ubisoft, Starlink is genius: space combat and exploration crossed with collectable models. (Who said toys-to-life was dead, eh?) Playing as a troop of fighter pilots, you battle to protect the star-system Atlas from attack by the evil Forgotten Legion. While the action that's been shown so far looks solid, the real-time interplay between the models and the gameplay is what's most intriguing. Editing your customisable starships in real-life alters them in-game, meaning you can change guns or switch pilots mid-battle if you need to change your approach quickly. It may be a ploy to sell toys, but it's a compelling one.

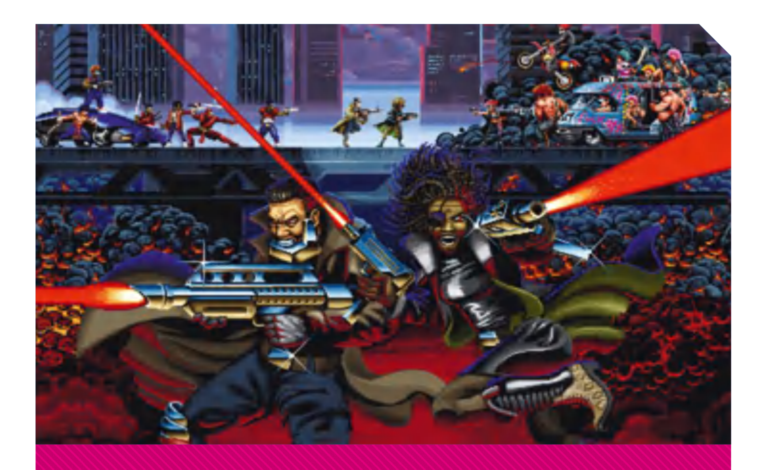
Format PC **Publisher** Team17
Developer Firecast **ETA** Spring 2018

SWORD LEGACY: OMEN

Hard as grails

56 Hailing from Brazil, Firecast's Sword Legacy: Omen is a real RPG fan's RPG. It's got deep, complex mechanics, an emphasis on tactics and exploration – you're looking for Excalibur, hoping it will solve your kingdom's problems – and a setting that merges historical legend with modern myth. Described as a "bloody, brutal take on Arthurian legend," the game includes a stress mechanic similar to that in Darkest Dungeon (watch you don't worry yourself to death!), but has a slightly lighter aesthetic more akin to Final Fantasy Tactics or The Banner Saga. Let's hope it's as fantastic to play as it is to look at.





Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Coffee Stain Publishing
Developer Easy Trigger **ETA** Summer 2018

HUNTDOWN

Serve the public trust, protect the innocent…



Take every '80s sci-fi film worth mentioning, put them together as a side-scrolling arcade shooter and you have Huntdown. The cyberpunk is strong with Easy Trigger's first release, following a hitman as they take out contracts on gang leaders. The ultra-colourful, hand-drawn pixel graphics and high framerate mean the game definitely looks the part, the gang violence and dystopian backdrop demonstrating obvious influences from RoboCop to Blade Runner to The Warriors. Suitably enough there's a synth-inspired soundtrack too, providing the cherry on top of this pink-mulleted cake.



Format PC **Pub** Finji
Dev Andrew Shouldice **ETA** Summer 2018

TUNIC

Isometric like a fox

58 Tunic looks exactly like what it is: Legend Of Zelda, but with a fox. We know, we know – cute, right? Developer Andrew Shouldice, has designed an isometric action-adventure that's an adorable little twist on the theme. So far it looks set to feature lots of sword-swinging, dodge-rolling, pot-smashing action. Publisher Finji previously put out Night In The Woods in February 2017, so it's developing a reputation for these Animals-Of-Farthing-Wood-themed releases. We're not complaining.

Format PS4, PC **Pub** Mossmouth **Dev** Blitworks **ETA** Winter 2018

SPELUNKY 2

Spelunky harder



Be honest: you cried during the reveal trailer for Spelunky 2. There's no shame in it, we did too! The teaser was a clever one, giving us all we need to know to be on our way for the sequel. We'll be playing as the daughter of the adventurer from the first game and, well, that's it for now. But with a game like Spelunky that's enough; the prize is in taking the leap of faith. If creator Derek Yu accomplishes with the second even half of what he did with the first, it'll be another adventure for the ages.

Format PC **Pub** Jovian Industries **Dev** Jovian Industries **ETA** Summer 2018

HEARTS PAPERS BORDER

Imagine all the people, living life in peace



If ever there's a time when a game like Hearts Papers Border is necessary, it's now. Part-strategy, part-adventure, the goal of the game is to create a world without borders through kindness. You slowly travel the world, meeting with locals and spreading the good word of tolerance while updating a blog about your experiences. If you do it well enough, you'll gain a following, inspiring more people to demand fairer government and disavow bigoted beliefs that hold their communities back. A revolution in peace, love, and prosperity. It's in Early Access if you want a head start.

GM Feature
On The Cover!

Not an argument we'd advise interfering in, this. Hopefully you can nip in and finish off the victor.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Capcom **Developer** Capcom **ETA** 26 January 2018

MONSTER HUNTER WORLD

The series' return looks jura-tastic



The Monster Hunter series has always revelled in weirdness – in allowing you to dress up your character and craft complex weaponry to take on dragons and dinosaurs, with which you can craft even more complex weaponry, and in having anthropomorphic cats cook dinners for you and help you hunt down these primeval beasts.

Until now, gamers outside Japan haven't been that receptive to the series, but times have changed since the last Monster Hunter game hit home consoles seven years ago. The indie market and success of the Dark Souls series in the intervening years have shown that Western gamers aren't averse to a bit of quirkiness these days.

Monster Hunter World marks a big step forward for the series, debuting a large semi-open map and global online multiplayer that will make alluring bait for curious players from around the world. It's a daunting, wild world made up of distinct, functioning ecosystems. And it's replete with surprises; monsters can be tricked into fighting each other (a cunning way to save yourself the trouble of weakening them), the ground can collapse beneath your feet to reveal an uncharted underworld filled with new beasts, and up to four players can now join forces to hunt scaled-up versions of monsters together.

With its unpausable inventories and deep combat that rewards you for taking the time to truly get to understand every species you hunt, and expects you to master each distinctive weapon you wield and environment you fight in, Monster Hunter World could be described as 'Dark Souls by way of Pokémon' – a proposition that any discerning gamer should at least cast their gaze on.











You can use the materials from different species of monster to make weapons and armour with specific strengths and weaknesses.







Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Frontier Developments
Developer Frontier Developments **ETA** June 2018

JURASSIC WORLD EVOLUTION

You didn't ask for reality, you asked for more teeth!

62 Better known for its spacefaring Elite series, Frontier Developments is following up the success of Planet Coaster by giving you the chance to build your very own Jurassic Park. Attempted once before with Jurassic Park Genesis, this is a more robust take on the idea, and in visuals, if nothing else, it impresses with an incredible amount of detail. Of course, managing the resort is one thing but, as we know from the films, managing a disaster is another. Expect problems beyond simply making money, a quality sure to set this apart from other business simulations.

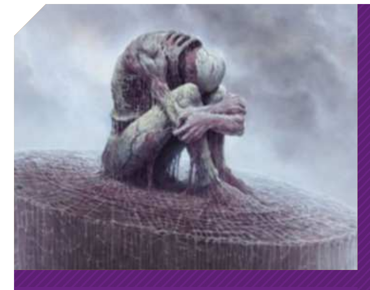
Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Focus Home Interactive
Developer Cyanide **ETA** Autumn 2018

CALL OF CTHULHU

The squids are all right

63 A new take on the Lovecraft mythos, following 2005's Dark Corners of the Earth, this is again a first-person horror adventure, but with added RPG elements, based on the lauded tabletop RPG of the same name. Developer Cyanide promises a semi-open world, investigations, and stealth. Psychological horror was Lovecraft's stock-in-trade, and we expect your sanity to play a large part in the game. You'll be playing as investigator Edward Pierce, investigating the deaths of a family in a creepy mansion, whose basement appears to be packed with cultists. We also see him in a mental asylum, which doesn't bode too well on the 'staying sane' front and suggests you may have to reconcile your experiences in some fashion. Expect a helping of tentacled beasties too.





Format PC **Pub** Ebb Software
Dev Ebb Software **ETA** Summer 2018

SCORN

Flesh hell

65 Channelling the works of HR Giger (y'know, Alien?), it's certainly hard to ignore Scorn's visuals. But it's Giger's biological imagery, rather than his mechanical or psychosexual art, that's the main influence here, as you find yourself in a world made entirely of gross, intertwining flesh, with meaty monsters to match. Even the game's weapons are grisly, made of bone and guts, and they *move*. You can explore the atmospheric world in any order, discovering themed areas as you push on. The developers want you to always be on edge in this nightmarish location, constantly unsure how to proceed and rethinking your approach. In a world like this, that shouldn't be too hard. When you've got fleshy... *things* scuttling at you, being on edge comes naturally.





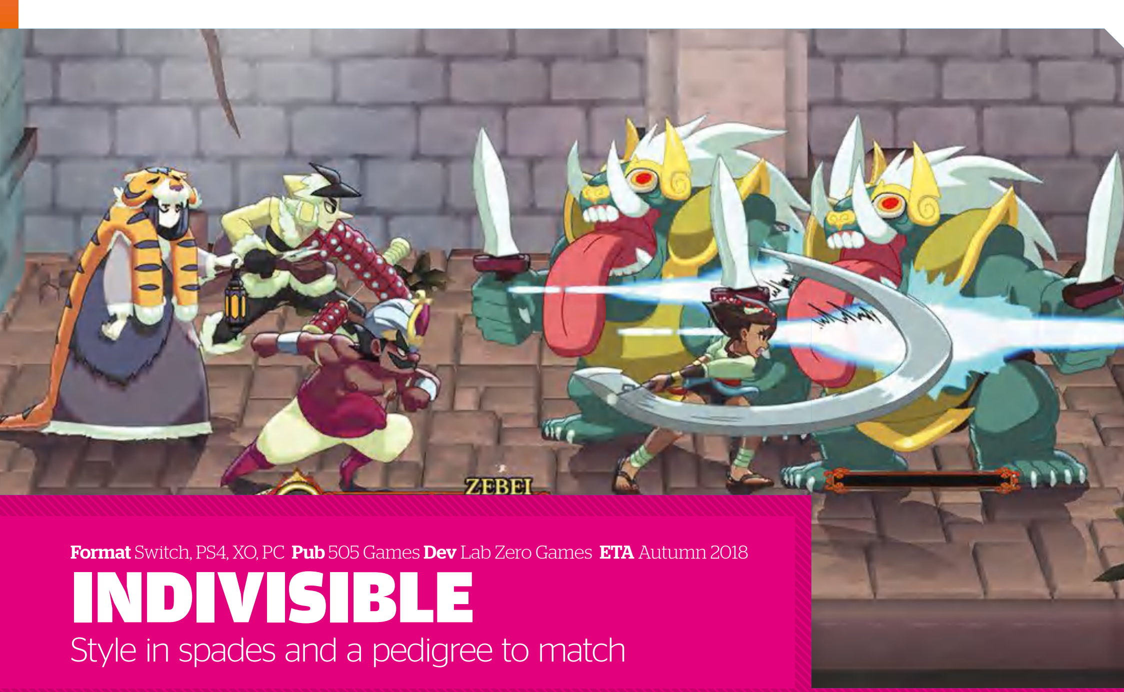
Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Starbreeze Studios
Dev Double Fine **ETA** Autumn 2018

PSYCHONAUTS 2

The sequel we've dreamed of

66 It's taken 13 years, but a sequel to the 2005 cult classic, Psychonauts, is happening at last thanks to a successful Fig crowdfunding campaign. The new game promises the same quirky style – albeit, we hope, taking advantage of modern platforms' improved graphical capabilities – and quality humour, but with all-new abilities.

You play as Raz, a freshly graduated 'Psychonaut', a person who dives into peoples minds to fix their problems. Each level of the game, then, represents the psyche of the individual, and you'll learn about them through exploration and puzzle solving – the same clever blend of platforming and storytelling that made Psychonauts beloved. Lots of time has been spent making sure the fundamentals of movement and control feel just right, so expect this to be far more polished the the original. Director Tim Schafer has also promised that this time round we'll learn more about Raz's family and the mysterious curse that follows them.



Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** 505 Games **Dev** Lab Zero Games **ETA** Autumn 2018

INDIVISIBLE

Style in spades and a pedigree to match

64 From the creators of Skull Girls comes this Metroidvania action-RPG – the tale of Ajna, who's on a quest to discover the truth behind her mysterious powers. As you'd expect, she'll meet plenty of other heroes. Like some sort of soul-stealing Kirby, she's able to absorb the 'Incarnations' she encounters, then manifest them later to help in battle as part of a fighting game-esque combat system, where each character is assigned to a button for crazy combos.

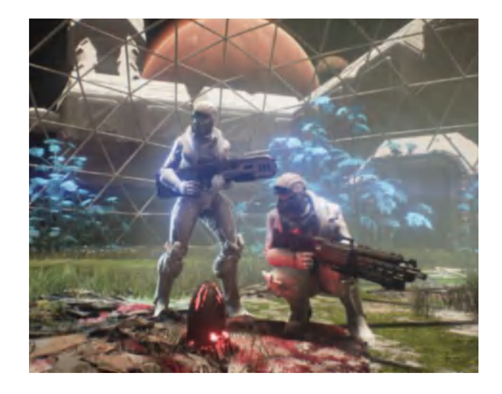
What makes Indivisible stand out from the crowd is those gorgeous hand-animated characters set against lovely, painterly backdrops. It really is eye-catching, and pleasingly different from its more retro-styled peers. The developer has also brought aboard composer Hiroki Kikuta, known for his work on Secret Of Mana. Curious? There's a playable prototype demo on Steam now!

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Team17
Developer Radiation Blue **ETA** Autumn 2018

GENESIS ALPHA ONE

In space, no one can hear you scheme

67 Running a farm is so 2017. In 2018 we'll be aiming rather higher. This is a hugely ambitious survival shooter that sees you tasked with managing and building your very own starship, tacking on things like greenhouses, reactors, and refineries to keep your crew alive and expanding. You explore a randomly-generated universe, scouring it for a new home for humanity and gathering resources while fending off alien attackers. As if that's not enough you'll also be cloning your own humans, trying to improve them with each generation to better suit the needs of the ship. On its ambition alone, this is one to keep an eye on.

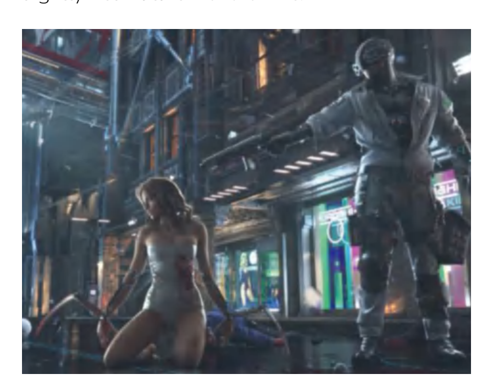


Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** CD Projekt Red
Developer CD Projekt Red **ETA** Winter 2019

CYBERPUNK 2077

Be bewitchered all over again

68 After The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt put CD Projekt Red at the very top of the RPG ladder, hopes are high that Cyberpunk 2077 will do the same all over again. Based on a tabletop RPG, Cyberpunk 2020, the game will drop you into a near-future dystopia where technology's run amok and people modify their own bodies as well as the environment around themselves. You'll create and customise your own character, a huge departure from The Witcher, with the ability to install ability enhancing implants. Perhaps the most exciting change from the studio's previous series is the inclusion of some multiplayer elements – details haven't been released, but we're hoping to immerse ourselves in a gritty near-future world online.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** THQ Nordic **Developer** Gunfire Games **ETA** Autumn 2018

DARKSIDERS III

Fans will be anything but furious



69 The next instalment in the popular Darksiders series has us now playing as Fury, this game's alternative to one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, as she goes on a quest to destroy the seven deadly sins. Described as the most unpredictable of the four, she wields whips and magic, pushing the game to feature more fast-paced combat than before. This entry takes places parallel to the events of the first two and will flesh out the universe even further – it looks like being a real fan-pleaser.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** PlayWay
Dev Madmind Studio **ETA** 20 March 2018

AGONY

Could be ecstasy

70 In this first-person horror title you wake up with no memories in the depths of hell (a night out gone wrong?). Your one hope of escape is to meet the Red Goddess. You do have an ace up your sleeve, though: the ability to possess others, including the demons that patrol areas of the inferno. Despite the similarities in ability to Oddworld, we doubt we'll be possessing our own farts any time soon.

When you're not controlling foes you'll be hiding from them, tucking yourself away in sheltered spots in the game's disturbing and twisted environments, with your rising heart beat to warn you of approaching danger. With plenty of horrific imagery, including forests made of corpses and rivers of blood, Agony is sure to make an impression – and probably give us nightmares.

Format Switch **Pub** Twice Circled
Dev Twice Circled **ETA** March 2018

MEGAQUARIUM

The world is your oyster

71 In the vein of classic Tycoon games, this gentle sim sees you running your very own aquarium. There's an immense degree of customisation to proceedings with, naturally, the ability to decorate your various fish tanks (castles had better be included). You'll then fill them with everything from the humble clownfish, to jellyfish, and even sharks – it's going to live up to that 'mega' monicker. You'll also be breeding the fish and looking after the staff who are caring for your precious swimmers. Of course, pleasing visitors is the ultimate goal, so you'll have to consider more than just your own fishy favouritism. If Twice Circled's previous game, Big Pharma, is anything to go by, this should be a whip-smart take on the management sim genre.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** THQ Nordic **Developer** Experiment 101 **ETA** Summer 2018

BIOMUTANT

Cute to kill

72

The post-apocalypse has never been this colourful. Experiment 101's upcoming kung-fu/RPG mash-up proves that the end of the world doesn't have to be a gloomy affair painted in every shade of grey and brown. Taking control of an adorable raccoon-like creature, you can customise its look, changing its size, fur type, style, and colour.

Your critter's on a daring quest to save the Tree Of Life from a nasty creature that's been using its roots as a toothpick – a menace that threatens the very existence of this weird world. Combat involves a mix of gunplay and martial arts-inspired melee that focuses on movement and agility.

When more traditional combat methods aren't enough, you can use mutations, which grant extra abilities, and change the look and attributes of your furry friend. Physical mutations include some nifty robotic legs, claws, or a barbed tail, and psi-mutations allow you to do things like use levitation or unleash a flurry of moths to daze opponents. Throw in a plethora of vehicles, including hot air balloons and jet skis, in which to traversed this fruity, freedom-filled playground, and it all adds up to an unmissable party at the end of the world.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Focus Home Interactive
Developer Spiders **ETA** Autumn 2018

GREEDFALL

Blast from the past

73 The captivating style and unique premise of Greedfall sure has us excited. Taking inspiration from Baroque art and the history of 17th century Europe, this action-RPG revolves around colonial settlers invading a remote island where the elven natives are protected by supernatural forces. You're able to align yourself with whatever side you see fit, but given the ferocity of those mysterious guardian creatures, we'd wager the locals are the wiser choice here.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Good Shepherd Entertainment **Dev** CreativeForge Games **ETA** Summer 2018

PHANTOM DOCTRINE

Playing with politics

74 A serious and strategic thriller, Phantom Doctrine closely resembles the tactical action of XCOM but swaps aliens for human spies. Its isometric, turn-based action takes place in 1983, during the Cold War, and offers an alternative version of history in which you take control of a secret organisation known as The Cabal. The stakes are high, with your alliance tackling a global conspiracy that pits nations against each other. It's a refreshingly deep approach to combat where brainpower is as crucial as firepower.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft Montpellier **ETA** Winter 2019

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2

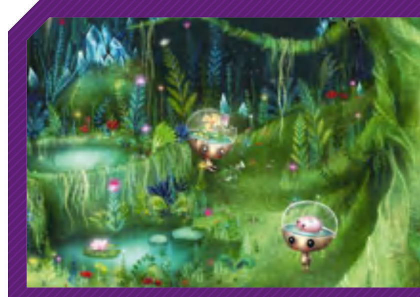
Monkey business

75 Recent years have yielded their fair share of rumours, doubts, and disappointments over a follow-up to cult classic Beyond Good And Evil. Happily, this year's E3 saw the series return in spectacular style. Sailing into prequel territory, your customisable character can recruit crew members – including an anthropomorphic Cockney monkey – for some space-based pirate shenanigans. The cinematic trailer showcases an adventure that's oozing with spectacle, including a daring escape from city law enforcement via flying motorbike. Expect beautifully rich environments filled with raucous characters and brazen humour.









Format PC **Pub** Wabisabi Games
Dev Wabisabi Games **ETA** Winter 2018

GROWBOT

Grow big or grow home

76 Growbot flies in the face of the belief that every game has to be a violent, blood-filled extravaganza. This 2D point-and-click adventure has a charming visual style and narrative seemingly ripped right out of a children's storybook. You play as Nara, a 'Growbot' aboard a space station filled with exotic flora and wonderfully weird alien creatures, including an adorable white fluffy creature with spaghetti arms. After an attack, you must explore the station in search of its captain. Gameplay details are still thin on the ground, but exploration and puzzle solving are likely at the heart of this whimsical adventure that's sure to leave you feeling all fuzzy on the inside.

Format PS VR **Pub** Sony
Dev Supermassive Games **ETA** 23 Jan 2018

THE INPATIENT

Virtual insanity

77 Set 60 years before teen scarefest Until Dawn, The Inpatient looks set to be a tale of true terror with, thankfully, 100 per cent less adolescent drama than we witnessed in Supermassive's first horror offering. Placing you in the shackles of an amnesia-ridden patient of Blackwood Sanatorium in the 1950s, how you chose to interact with the facility's mysterious inhabitants affects how this sinister story unfolds. This VR experience will likely test the sanity of even the bravest of players.



Format PC **Publisher** Versus Evil
Developer Obsidian Entertainment **ETA** Spring 2018

PILLARS OF ETERNITY II: DEADFIRE

The saga continues

78 The game that revived old-timey cRPGs is getting a sequel. Retaining the isometric perspective and ornate pre-rendered backgrounds that made the original Pillars such a nostalgic treat, Deadfire sends you to a new part of Eora in pursuit of a long-dormant god.

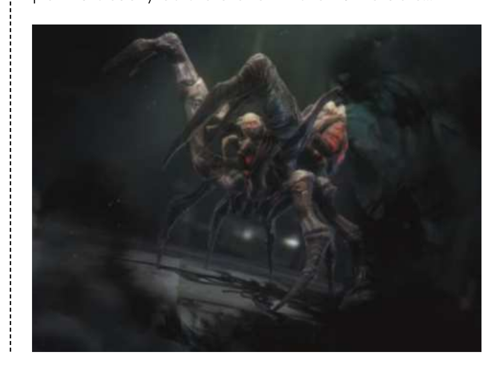
One of the big new mechanics here is multiclassing, allowing you to pick an additional role when creating your character (Wizard Assassin, anyone?), and to distribute experience between them as you please. The artwork and polished visuals look stunning, and combat has been overhauled too, with smarter AI, slower pacing, and fewer random encounters.

Format PC **Publisher** Snapshot Games
Developer Snapshot Games **ETA** Winter 2018

PHOENIX POINT

X-COM: Blue Planet edition

79 The modern XCOM games have been a hit, so it's only fitting that the creator of the original X-COM (yes, they are spelled differently), Julian Gollop, jumps aboard the dropship. Phoenix Point is spiritually X-COM through and through, albeit this time the threat comes from mutants residing in the briny depths of the ocean. With the world covered by a "microbial mist", you must search the planet for enclaves of civilisation, then drop squads into turn-based battles to fend off the crustacean mutations. Enemies adapt to your weapons and tactics, physically evolving and morphing throughout the campaign, making your fragile, perma-deathy soldiers ever more vulnerable...





Format PC **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Creative Assembly **ETA** Summer 2018

TOTAL WAR SAGA: THRONES OF BRITANNIA

Hwæt a historical return!

80 It's been an anxious time for the 'historical' Total War fanbase, what with Creative Assembly going on a three-year trip to Warhammer's world of burrowing rat armies, dino cannons, and other grimdark imaginings. But no more, because Thrones Of Britannia marks the start of the very-much historical 'Saga' series.

This spin-off series (worked on by a different team to the mainline historical games and the Warhammer lot) will hone in on flashpoint moments in history, rather than sprawling epochs. Thrones Of Britannia kicks things off in Britain, 878AD, in the aftermath of the Vikings' defeat to Saxon King Alfred The Great. With Viking remnants settling in northern and eastern parts of England, Wales still divided into separate kingdoms, the southern Saxon kingdom of Wessex resurgent, and the Scottish Gaels coming into their own, this period is a hotbed for the kind of belligerent diplomacy (i.e. war) the series is renowned for.



Format PC **Pub** 11 bit studios
Dev 11 bit studios **ETA** Summer 2018

FROSTPUNK

Warm up with some steam

81 The team behind This War Of Mine takes us to a steampunk vision of 1886, where the world has frozen over and you must build a society around a solitary giant heat generator standing tall in the ice. As much a city-builder as it is a survival game, Frostpunk charges you not only with gathering and building, but also managing morale and implementing laws that you deem best for your people. Your moral compass will spin out of control as you mull over such possibilities as legalising cannibalism and the practical benefits of child labour in your bid to help your society survive the frigid wasteland.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Kalypso Media
Dev Limbic Entertainment **ETA** Spring 2018

TROPICO 6

Bananas is our business

82 The fantasy of ruling over a Latin-American paradise is the exclusive domain of Tropico (we hear that any potential rivals have been exiled, detained, or otherwise 'silenced'). As the definitely-not-dictator, you choose whether to rule as an iron-fisted generalissimo, a friend of the working man, or a business-minded mogul who prioritises tourism and commerce.

The latest entry spreads your responsibility across an entire archipelago, with a new system of infrastructure building, palace customisation, election speeches, and, errr, the ability to haul in the Statue Of Liberty using ropes and a squadron of light aircraft. El Presidente has friends in high places, it seems...

Format PC **Pub** Alexis Kennedy
Dev Alexis Kennedy **ETA** Summer 2018

CULTIST SIMULATOR

Call Of Card-thulu

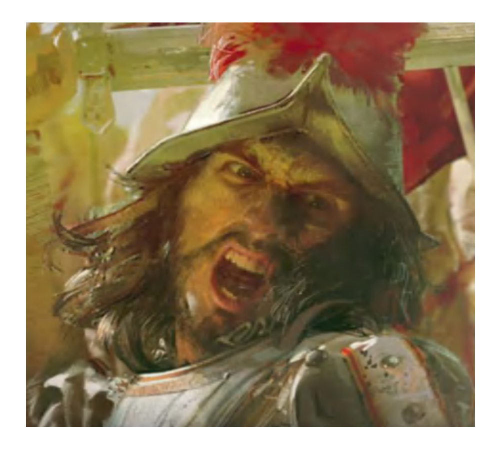
83 The co-founder of Failbetter Games (Sunless Sea) has gone solo, taking his passion for Victoriana and Lovecraftian fantasy in a curious new direction. Cultist Simulator is a digital card game in which you play a cultist becoming embroiled in dark arts, rituals, and worshipping Cthulhu-esque deities. You gather followers, sacrifice said followers if necessary, and try not to lose your mind as you go deeper into your dark practices (although there is an 'insane' victory condition, so on second thought, by all means go crazy). The writing, eerie soundscape, and endless occult possibilities arising through the game rules should more than make up for the elegant yet rudimentary visual style.

Format PC **Publisher** Microsoft Studios
Developer Relic Entertainment **ETA** Autumn 2018

AGE OF EMPIRES IV

Finally...

84 Gamers have been clamouring for a new Age Of Empires entry for the best part of the last decade, although the continued success of Age of Empires II HD kind of shows why Microsoft hasn't been in much of a hurry. There's not much we know about AOE IV yet, except that it's one of the biggest events in the strategy game calendar, and – if the trailer is to be believed – it casts a wide historical net, featuring Romans, Samurai, Redcoats, and Native Americans... presumably not at the same time, but hey, it's videogames, so who knows?

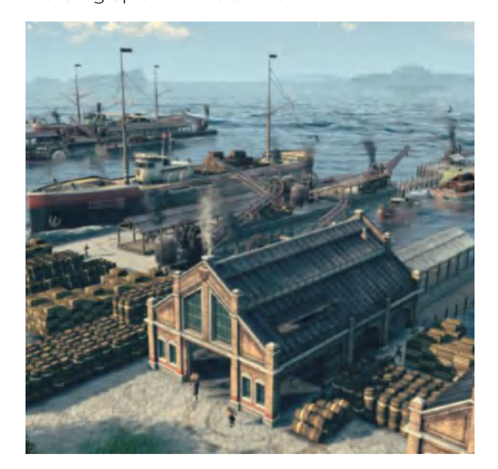


Format PC **Publisher** Ubisoft
Developer Blue Byte **ETA** Winter 2018

ANNO 1800

Fuel the fires of industry

85 The Anno series returns to Earth from its cosmic journey to the year 2205. This time, it's set in the coal-fuelled, furnace-feeding period of the 19th century. Industrialisation on a world-changing scale, workers going on strike, presumably a bit of colonial exploitation if Blue Byte dares to go there – yes, this was a glorious time in the most traditional, Victorian sense of the word. The Anno series has always thrived best when set in the past, and the news that we will be able to explore and settle in distant lands suggests that this entry is scaling up the series' ambition.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Epic Games **Dev** Epic Games **ETA** Winter 2018

FORTNITE

That Battle Royale thing sure helped...

86 Epic Games' vibrant survival sandbox shooter got off to a decent start when it launched in Early Access in July. However, it ascended to unthinkable heights when it hopped on the Battlegrounds bandwagon by adding a free-to-play Battle Royale mode. People couldn't get enough of that. Now, Fortnite is a shrub-riding, base-building (and, in turn, base-demolishing) internet phenomenon and we can't wait to see what garish nonsense will be added in time for its full release in 2018.

Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Over The Moon
Dev Over The Moon **ETA** February 2018

THE FALL PART 2

A Metroidvanian thriller

87 The Fall is one of the most atmospheric, mind-frying platformers of all time, casting you as ARID, a combat suit AI trying to keep the unconscious human contained therein alive. Like every great thriller, it's a rabbit-hole of growing paranoia, distrust, and uncertainty over events as they unfold. The sequel builds on this: this time ARID has broken free from its program, switching between three different robots in a noirish, dystopian world.

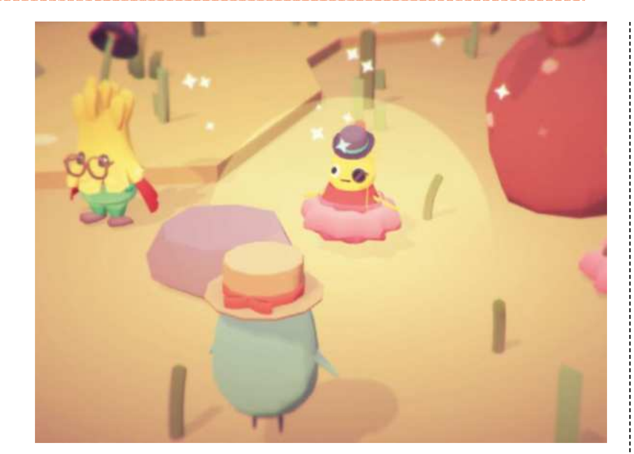
It looks set to be another suspenseful blend of action (with all-new melee combat mechanics), puzzle-solving, and exploration, with plenty of systemic silliness to experiment with. As you progress through the thought-provoking narrative, prepare to be confronted with moral and ideological quandaries aplenty.

Format PC **Publisher** Blizzard
Developer Blizzard **ETA** Autumn 2018

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE FOR AZEROTH

Now with added RTS

88 The game that keeps on giving, or perhaps the siphon that keeps on taking? Whichever way you look at World Of Warcraft, its success is unrelenting as it prepares to launch its seventh expansion, Battle For Azeroth. Alongside the obligatory level cap rise (from 110 to 120), there will be two vast new continents to explore, Kul Tiras and Zandalar, plus six new playable sub-races (three for Alliance, three for Horde). The most audacious new feature, however, is Warfronts – a PvE mode that's a little bit Warcraft III, little bit MOBA, where 20 players gather resources, build bases, and raise troops to take territory from powerful AI commanders.



Format XO, PC **Publisher** Double Fine Presents
Developer Glumberland **ETA** Summer 2018

OOBLETS

Farm yourself some friends

89 We're not sure if there's a game on the horizon as utterly adorable as this one. Only someone with a heart of ice could fail to be charmed by its colourful style, and the cast of cute little creatures that follow your protagonist around.

You play as a farmer of sorts, but instead of growing boring old vegetables, you grow monsters (some of which, we admit, do look rather plantlike) to take on quests. Expect to split your time between decorating your home, training creatures, and those adventures we do so enjoy. It's a simple premise but one that builds on the promise of cherished classics. We expect lovely things from this one.

Format PS4, XO **Publisher** Codemasters
Developer Codemasters **ETA** Summer 2018

ONRUSH

Rally your friends.

90 Better known for its rally games that skew closer to simulation than arcade action, Codemasters' new title is a break from that storied history. This is an over-the-top, arcade-style racer in which you must collide with other players on the track and take advantage of every opportunity for stunts. Teams are also a vital element, so your rampages have to be considered. Instead of bashing about randomly, crashing into an opponent at a key moment will benefit your side.

To top it all off, the game's vehicles are split into eight classes, and include motorbikes as well as cars, to help players define their role within a unit. With impressive visuals and a chaotic level of destruction, this could be a breath of fresh air among more demanding, realistic racers.





Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Kojima Productions **ETA** Summer 2019

DEATH STRANDING

More phantom, less pain

91 After the huge success of Metal Gear Solid V, Hideo Kojima has set out with his own studio, Kojima Productions, and this entirely new IP. The trailers don't give a lot away, showing our presumed hero (played by Norman Reedus) waking on a beach of black sand, naked, while otherworldly figures watch from beyond the shore. Elsewhere we've seen images of soldiers caked in oil (including a leader played by Mads Mikkelsen) and babies kept in tubes (held by none other than director Guillermo del Toro). It certainly builds on the promise of MGS's weirder moments.

As to how it will actually function as a game, Kojima's been very tight-lipped on the subject and has only said that it will be some kind of action game, albeit one which he hopes will break genre conventions. It's said to feature an open-world environment and some multiplayer features, though what exactly those are is anyone's guess. However it ultimately plays, some impressive technology is used to render these visuals. Kojima's utilising Guerilla Games' Decima engine, recently showcased in Horizon Zero Dawn. It's rare to get a mystery like this in gaming, and Death Stranding is definitely intriguing us. However it turns out in the end, this will be one to watch.

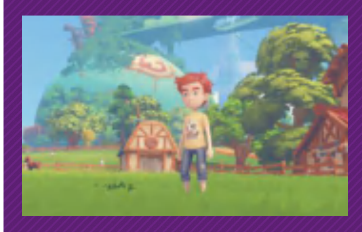


Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC, Mobile **Pub** Team Meat **Dev** Team Meat **ETA** Spring 2018

SUPER MEAT BOY FOREVER

An even meatier sequel?

92 It's the return of the delightful Meat Boy and Bandage Girl, a pair suited to each other as well as platforming and failure. This time around the duo are out to save their child, Nugget, who has been captured by the evil Doctor Fetus (not a real doctor). This sequel simplifies the controls, leaving you to control only two abilities beside movement: jumping and sliding. Yet a jump in mid-air will propel you forward with a giant fist, and a tap of the slide button will send you plummeting back to ground. Expect punishingly difficult levels, instant death, and a demand for lightning reflexes.



Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Team17
Dev Pathea Games **ETA** Autumn 2018

MY LIFE AT PORTIA

Tool time

93 Set in a post-apocalyptic world, this colourful RPG takes us to the edge of civilisation. You are asked to help improve the town of Portia, using your workshop to build tools. The promise of the game is in its simulated world, where NPCs go through routines, whether that's going to school or seeking fun. You will be able to get caught up in these NPCs' stories during your exploration of the large open world, and there's even the option for romance. Of course.



Format Switch **Pub** Numizmatic
Dev Numizmatic **ETA** Spring 2018

LIGHT FINGERS

A board game for rogues



94 What do thieves do after a night's robbery? Apparently they gamble all their spoils on a rather complex board game. You'll be combining dice rolls and special cards to see yourself through the titular board game, a mechanical box that unfolds a world as you move through it, all while guards give pursuit.

That clockwork world is a real show-stealer, the best kind of animated eye candy, and sure to contain surprises, keeping you guessing about what's to come next. This deep but easy to understand game of miniatures seems perfectly suited to Switch.

Format PC, Mobile **Publisher** Amanita Design
Developer Amanita Design **ETA** Spring 2018

CHUCHEL

Absurdly infectious

95 From the creators of the beloved Machinarium comes a quirky new title bursting with joy and colour. You lead Chuchel, the slightly unhinged main character, through various bizarre puzzles, all in the pursuit of a stolen cherry. A cherished one, we assume.

What sticks with us is Chuchel's manic laughter, his angry screams and garbled speech. The fury of the fuzzy little blob is effortlessly amusing, and even if you only watch the trailer the game's sense of whimsy will get right under your skin. It's not the only colourful game on the horizon, but none of the others have quite the energy of this, bouncing off the walls with strange characters designed by Botanicula's Jaromir Plachy.

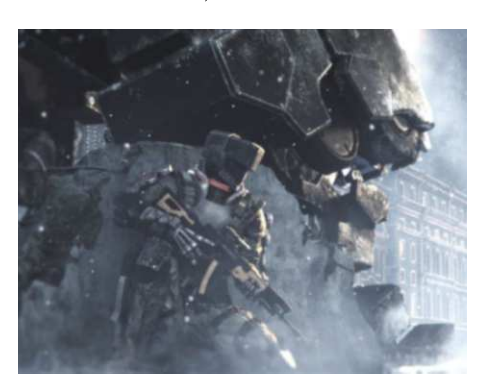


Format PS4, PC **Publisher** Square Enix
Developer Square Enix **ETA** Autumn 2018

LEFT ALIVE

This one's all about the people

96 Set in the Front Mission universe – between the fifth entry and Evolved, to be exact – this survival third-person shooter looks to offer a street level view on a world dominated by humongous mechs. You won't be customising giant robots but crafting weapons and traps, surviving in a crumbling world of snow and rubble. With artist Yoji Shinkawa on board, famed for his work on the Metal Gear series, the game certainly has plenty of style, and the presence of Mobile Suit Gundam 00 mech designer Takayuki Yanase should ensure the robots are top-notch too. Square Enix CEO Yosuke Matsuda has already talked of developing it into a triple-A brand. There's certainly promise in what little has been shown, and we're keen to see more.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** EA **Dev** Bioware **ETA** Winter 2018

ANTHEM

Bioware attempts to find its destiny

97 Set on a ravaged future planet (aren't they always?) this new title promises a spectacular open world to be explored by mechs. You'll take on quests and meet characters during first-person sections in a walled, defended city. After that, you leave the comfort of this area for the huge environments beyond, piloting mech suits (called Javelins) in third-person. What a world it is too, one where you fly between massive ruins and run through dense jungle before taking a dive into dark waters, all seamlessly.
The game also boasts an online co-operative element, not dissimilar from those in The Division or Destiny, with a shared world full of quests. This MMO/shooter genre already seems a little crowded, to be honest, but if Bioware can bring its signature quality storytelling, characters, and world-building to bear, then

Format Switch, PS4, PC **Pub** Matt Makes Games Inc
Dev Matt Makes Games Inc **ETA** January 2018

CELESTE

Mount Pleasant or Mount Doom?

98 As settings for platformers go, a mountain, ripe with opportunities for climbing and falling, is a pretty good one, so this game from the creator of Towerfall, already has our attention. Your mountain-climbing main character can hug walls briefly, allowing you to manoeuvre past deadly obstacles like falling ice and traps.

Of course, what really impresses us is the variety of other hazards. There are natural ones like blizzards, of course, but also evil doppelgängers and a giant, floating head (your guess is as good as ours). Celeste looks to be a platformer where the puzzles aren't static rooms, waiting to be tried over and over again but one with foes pushing you to be quicker and cleverer. Well, we're ready to speed up and get smart.

Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** TBC
Dev White Owls **ETA** Autumn 2019

THE GOOD LIFE

You can let yourself out

99 The new title from Hidetaka 'Swery' Suehiro, the creator of cult favourite Deadly Premonition, The Good Life follows the story of Naomi, a photographer from New York who winds up in Rainy Woods, England, supposedly the world's happiest village. As an outsider it's your job to question the validity of this claim, interacting with the locals, with events dictated by time and weather. Things get much stranger at night, the villagers all turning into cats or dogs (depending on which version of the game you purchase). Naomi also has different abilities depending on whether she's a cat or dog; cat-Naomi can climb, dog-Naomi can dig and follow scents.

After a failed Fig campaign, the dev plans to launch a new campaign on Kickstarter by the end of the year.

Stalking moose through rugged Montana is certainly a change of pace from Primal's woolly mammoth hunts.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Ubisoft Montreal **ETA** 27 February 2018

FAR CRY 5

Ubisoft's latest sandbox should be a cult hit

100 There's nothing like a jolting millennia-long jump in time to pep up a long-established franchise. 2016's Primal had you hunting down sabre-toothed tigers with pointy spears, so this upcoming shooter's modern Montana setting can't help but feel like a refreshing change.

Not that Far Cry's Hope County is going to be any safer than Oros Valley. The rural fields and backwater towns of Big Sky Country may not be populated by dire wolves or woolly rhinos, but that doesn't mean there aren't modern-day dangers just as deadly to contend with. Indeed, it looks like the series' latest hero, a completely customisable deputy sheriff, is going to have a hell of a time trying to rein in Hope County's resident cult, Eden's Gate. Led by a charismatic preacher by the name of Joseph Seed, the doomsday-spouting society looks like it will give the series a chance to once again address the themes of psychosis that Far Cry 3 so revelled in.

It's heartening to see Ubi Montreal's latest sandbox is leaning on winning mechanics from the franchise's past. Far Cry 2's buddies return in a rejigged 'Guns For Hire' system, while Primal's beast-taming feature has been recast as 'Fang For Hire', letting you tame wild animals with an eye on using them in combat. Animal lovers will be pleased to note that Boomer the dog is classed as a Fang, so you can have this Best Boy helping you out. As the game can be played co-operatively, you can even draft in a real pal if you like. This should be a brainwashed beaut.











Driving has always been surprisingly strong in Far Cry. Also, look at the ickle Vaas bobblehead on the dash. Awww.






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Odd Gods' influences include Red Dwarf, Monty Python's Meaning Of Life, Beetlejuice, Buffy, and Wayne's World.

With your Indie Master ★★ LOUISE BLAIN ★★

Who is...



Melbourne-based Inn Between Worlds is headed by Gil Maclean and Murray Philbrick. Maclean has worked for EA on games such as Need for Speed and Mass Effect, while Philbrick previously developed Freedom Force and Puzzle Quest 2.

Format PC **Developer** Inn Between Worlds **ETA** Mid 2018 **Web** http://bit.ly/gmoddgods

#1 ODD GODS

Dude, where's my RPG?



What are your lasting memories of the 1990s? This top-down RPG wants to take you back to your youth but sprinkle in time travel and devil worship. *Now* you're interested in Odd Gods. And you should be.

"I grew up in the '90s," says game lead Gil Maclean. "You got to see the twilight of the 'analogue' era – which makes it the dawn of the digital era. On one hand, mass consumerism, consolidation of corporate power creating weirdly sentient zaibatsu-demons that rule the world, with weird logo-illusionist high priests manipulating the world and transforming brands into the embodiment of a concept, like a kind of satanic-corporate-cauldron for brewing consumer demigods, and, on the other, the greatest explosion of culture and social rebellion since the '60s. When I started working on the idea, and asking 'what was the '90s about?' the responses were wildly different. So naturally, the only thing to do was to make a videogame about it."

Skater boy

Putting consumer demigods aside for a moment, Odd Gods takes '90s goths, jocks, and skaters and turns them into RPG subclasses. Loading up the *very* pre-alpha build, the first thing we're asked to do is choose a subculture. Of course we pick the goth girl, complete with black lipstick and enviable vampiric skin. "In the pre-alpha build, the differences are cosmetic – but the release version of the game includes subculture-specific 'traits'," explains Maclean.

"One [trait] is Gothic Gloom, available to goths. In combat, this makes you immune to morale break, since goths are already dead inside – or, at least, want to appear that way. In dialogue, Gothic Gloom can be employed to depress an NPC to the point where they'll give up. All NPCs have a 'subculture disposition' (even those not from the '90s) – which means if your subculture is compatible with theirs, they're more likely to like you. Just like the '90s." Everything revolves around your subculture, and there's always going to be someone who doesn't like your taste in music.



"I think Australia has a unique take on the '90s," says Maclean. "We consumed a lot of American culture that had a lot of effects on Australian society and culture."

"IN OG, YOU DON'T MANAGE A SPREADSHEET OF NUMBERS, YOU ROLEPLAY A CHARACTER"



The project was initially intended to be an "offbeat tactical RPG" inspired by XCOM, but then the idea of theming it round the 1990s arrived along with the demons and shaped the rest of the development process.



With restricted inventory space and a dazzling array of modern and ancient weaponry, you have to constantly think ahead.





Music in Odd Gods doesn't just give you a soundtrack or new friends, though. It opens up new dimensions for your hapless '90s trope to tumble through. We find tapes hidden in crates and add them to our inventory just in case. "Odd Gods features something we call pop-culture witchcraft," teases Maclean. "In those daemonic rituals, music is key – tuning in sound waves to harmonise with the etheric plane that permeates and separates all worlds and timelines. Music from parallel dimensions is particularly potent. Tapes are also a kind of currency when travelling through space-time. You're not the only person, cat, soft drink, or sentient building from the '90s that's lost in space-time – naturally, they all love music, but they're not all from *your* version of the 1990s..."

Wandering through corridors filled with posters of emoji faces and, oddly, kilted Scottish clansmen, we stumble upon a load of combat tools. Because Odd Gods isn't an alternate-dimension walking sim, there are enemies to battle and historic weapons to get slaughtery with. Is that a musket we can put in our inventory, as well as a skateboard to use as a makeshift club?

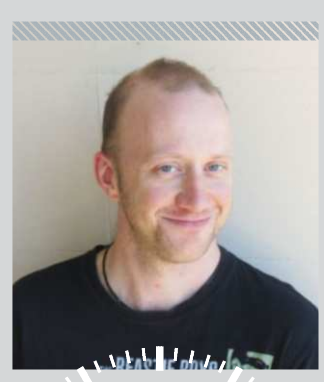
"Technology Imbalance is a major theme of Odd Gods," confirms Maclean. "That means you have anachronistic combats and encounters based on eras – modern, early modern, medieval, ancient. Sort of like when you take out a spearman in Civilisation with a tank. You can take a modern assault rifle back to the War Of The Roses, for example – in that environment, they're sort of like 'magic wands' in a sense, comparatively, but it balances out – you can't find machined 7.62mm ammunition in the 1500s, so you still need to be able to swing a sword... Other technology (penicillin, etc) can be pretty useful in other eras also."

> **TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS?**
>
> **Try this!**
>
> There's nothing out there quite like Odd Gods, but you could always try out the tricksy turn-based combat of supernatural Western Hard West on PC: http://bit.ly/gmhardwest

Tubular bells

By far Odd Gods' most impressive feature is its tactical combat. It might first appear turn-based as you plan your party's attacks but enemies can dodge your blows and get you first. You're going to have to get smart, whether it's with an Uzi or a broadsword. "Odd Gods' combat system is something I'm particularly proud of," says Maclean. "It's 'phase based' and deterministic. I was nervous showing it at PAX – nobody had seen anything like it – but the reception was incredibly positive. One of the design pillars for Odd Gods is to not be a slave to RPG convention.

"In OG, you don't manage a spreadsheet of numbers, you roleplay a character. There's no random number generation, no dice rolls, and no % to hit. There's no random encounters. No level scaling. You don't powergame based on (frankly) tired clichés and genre tropes. We built a system to match those goals. Odd Gods combat is about observation, planning, and execution." What do we think so far? Totally radical. ■



The 60 Second Pitch

Putting on eyeliner with **Gil Maclean**

"Odd Gods is a hardcore isometric CRPG about the 1990s, featuring cargo cults, space-time travel, and pop-culture demons. The game starts at underground squat party on New Year's Eve 1999, when something goes wrong... The 1990s were an explosion of subculture, music and rebellion in the twilight of the analogue era on one hand, and on the other, mass consumerism and corporate feudalism. There's no elves. No magic swords. You don't roll paladins – in Odd Gods, you choose a Subculture: say a Goth. Then, pick Industrial Metal as your Music Genre. As every '90s kid knows, there's more than one type of metal, punk, grunge. Finally, choose your stream – Underground, Alternative, or Mainstream – Dead Kennedys is Underground punk, whereas The Offspring is Mainstream. So, a Goth can have a secret shame – underneath the eyeliner, she's into mainstream pop. Your Goth is thus an outcast among outcasts – but in the wilds of space-time, you might find NPCs who will relate to that, and join your party, although it won't be easy..."

Format PS4, XO, PC **Developer** Cococucumber **ETA** 2018 **Web** http://bit.ly/gmriverbond

#2 RIVERBOND

Prepare to attack the block



Local multiplayer is very much the playground of indies these days. If games such as Overcooked have taught us anything, it's that settling down with a friend to play *together* is a force for good. That, and that it's tricky to cook burgers on two moving trucks... If cooking isn't your thing, though, might we suggest Riverbond, an adventure for up to four players coming in 2018?

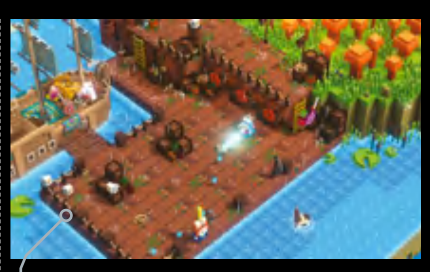
With a crisp voxel style that makes Minecraft look dull in comparison, Riverbond is a hack-and-slash where you can turn everything you see to a mess of pixels in a seconds. And you can do it with friends, and at 60 frames per second for that true, smooth feeling of wreaking Godzilla levels of havoc. "We wanted to capture that feeling of being a kid with a toy box full of Lego," explains Cococumber co-founder and art director. "It's the feeling of building whatever you wanted to build, however nonsensical and totally whimsical, and then destroying it."

Smash bandicoots

This isn't all about destruction, though. Well, more organised destruction, at least. "The campaign is divided into a series of short missions, most of them stretching over one or two maps," Chia explains. "You'll be helping the citizens of Riverbond with missions like fixing water fountains, freeing captives, or destroying a fortress. We wanted to keep these missions very focused so you're not handling a whole ton of quests at the same time, and to let players enjoy the exploration, combat, and some real-life bickering with each other."

And there'll be plenty to pick up. We might start the game in a bunny outfit but there are more unlockable quirky skins and plenty of loot. "Players will find weapons from treasure chests which they are able to equip, or timed power-ups like speed boosts or extra damage for a certain time," confirms Chia. "Players will also be able to buy weapons from the shops to gear up before a mission. There are also things like giant star collectibles, lots of coins, and some hidden secrets to uncover."

This is no procedurally generated world of blocks either. Every map has been carefully crafted, and there's a sense of jumping through seasons as you progress. Summer colours brighten forest sections, while a chilly winter arrives in the snow maps. Destroying things has never been this pretty. "Riverbond is all about bringing out a sense of adventure, and since it is set in a fantasy world with some sci-fi thrown in, we wanted to craft distinct and memorable locations and have each world be quite different from each other," says Chia. "Using voxels is a nod towards 8-bit and 16-bit games, and it also allow us to take advantage of using real-time physics. This lets players do awesome things like collapsing really tall pillars, or picking up and throwing large objects off the edge of the world. All the fun stuff." ■



You start out dressed in a bunny suit to blend in with the other forest dwellers but can end up as a doughnut or watermelon.



Not just a pretty name, Riverbond is all about the, well, *bond* we have with our companions in smashing the world to smithereens. D'aww.

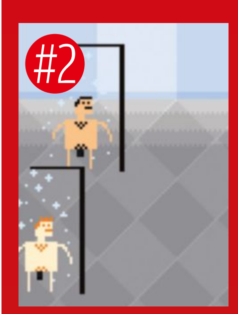
Small... But Perfectly Formed

Five odd indie games that make us ask... *why?!*



MY NAME IS MAYO

Yes, there really is currently a clicker on PS4 about a philosophical mayonnaise jar that reveals its secrets the more you tap it. It's also worrying how interested you'll be in a game with one repetitive mechanic when you find out there's a very attainable Platinum trophy in there. Hell(man)'s Bells.



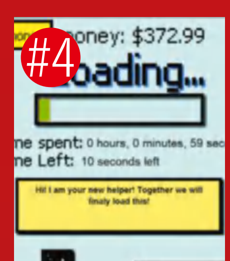
SHOWER WITH YOUR DAD SIMULATOR 2015

Described as a 'fast paced shower simulator where you shower with your 8-bit Dad' this unique game does exactly what it says on the very weird tin... and a bunch of other, even odder things too. Has to be played to be believed.



THERE'S POOP IN MY SOUP

Got your to-poo list to hand? It's time to defecate *everywhere*. This Steam Greenlight success lets you poop your way across the globe for only 89p. From New York to Paris, you can take a poo-dle for a walk or create a rata-poo-ille as you empty your bowels on everything in sight.



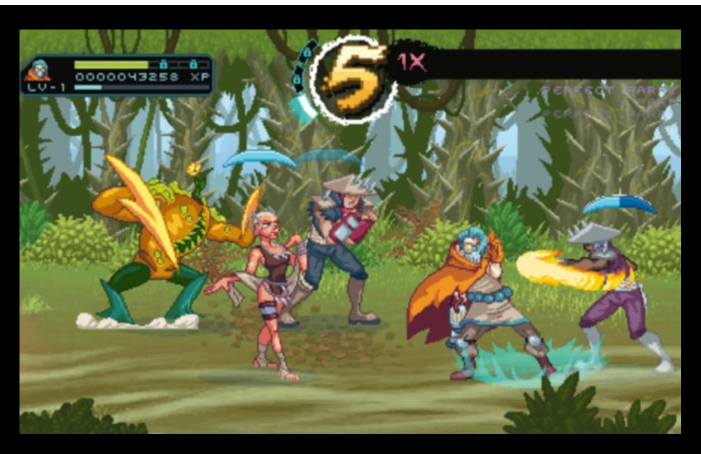
LOADING SCREEN SIMULATOR

The good news is that this is free. The bad news is that it's a whole game about the worst part of massive modern games – watching progress bars slowly fill up. It ends up being oddly compelling, even if you do start questioning your existence after a few hours.



I AM BREAD

Bossa Studios' unique toast-in-progress sim seems positively normal compared to the rest of this list. Making your way to the toaster is the name of the game, but with controls that feel like you're cracking a safe just to get off the ground, you'll need to use your loaf if you want to reach the end. ■



Format PS4, XO, PC **Dev** Household **ETA** 2018 **Web** bit.ly/gmwayofthepassivefist

#3 WAY OF THE PASSIVE FIST

Forget your packed punch box



Aside from the odd questionable skimpy outfit and too much muscle, there's one common factor in all fighting games. Violence. It kind of comes as standard, what with all the punches, kicks, and screaming KOs scrawling across the screen, and the word *fighting*. And yet, zenlike, Way Of The Passive Fist enters the ring and calmly knocks out the fury of its rivals with a quick dodge. Welcome to the brawler where you let your opponent exhaust themself instead of risking a broken nail by hammering their face. And the pun title is so good we're in awe.

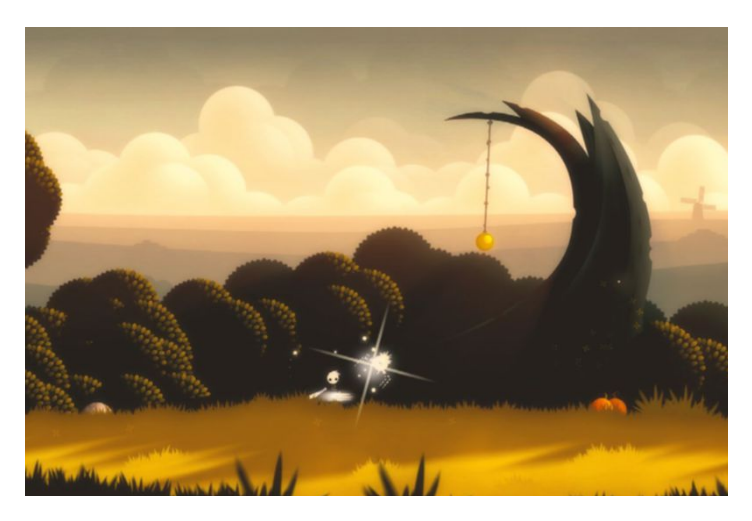
It shouldn't work. A fighting game without button mashing desperation or perfectly timed combo button presses to send an opponent flying? What's left? It turns out rather a lot. Playing as the mysterious Wanderer making his way across the planet of Zircon V, you must take on slews of brightly coloured arcade foes with only defence as your offence. Each enemy must be perfectly dodged and parried. In order to exhaust your opponent, it's vital to learn their fighting style to be able to react appropriately. It's cheating to say there's no violence altogether here as every dodge and parry adds to your super combo meter to give you a chance to smash your foe with a mega attack, but it's getting there that's truly satisfying.

No brawl games

There's no hammering your face buttons to victory here. Every brawl must be carefully timed like a rhythmic exercise in violence to give you the chance to watch your foe's stamina plummet as none of their blows connect. Progression unlocks powerful new techniques and abilities, meaning you're constantly evolving and learning new ways to be zen and violence free amidst the chaos. Throw in the Story and Arcade modes and the beautiful cartoon visuals and this is the brawler we didn't know we wanted. Thankfully it's coming to consoles as well as PC in 2018. Block out some time. ■



Reached full zen and managed to block every attack? Make your way to the personalised difficulty settings and crank them up.



Format PC **Developer** Atmos Games **ETA** 2018 **Web** http://bit.ly/gmonceuponacoma

#4 ONCE UPON A COMA

Look before you sleep



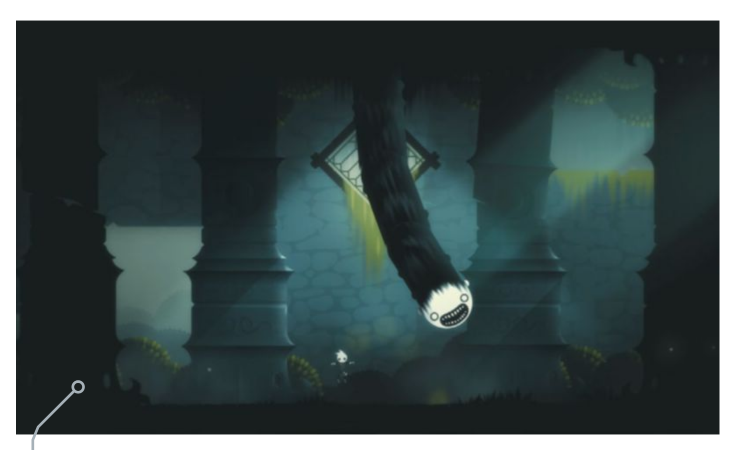
You know the drill. You wake up from a coma, your sister is missing and there are screams coming from the middle of the Black Wood (that you presumably can see from your very creepy house). Okay, maybe it's not quite everyone's day-to-day, but this dark and twisted follow up to lone developer Thomas Brush's Pinstripe – remember, the one about the minister going to hell to rescue his daughter? – looks like a beautifully atmospheric side-scroller.

Upon regaining consciousness, a young boy called Pete must journey into the forest to find the source of aforementioned screaming, and unravel the truth about his past. Nothing is quite as it seems, and the adults are apparently behaving even more strangely than usual. This is the sequel to Brush's very first flash game, appropriately titled Coma, and will follow Pete through a fascinating yet unnerving world, liberally slathered with deep, dark shadows, where reality and fiction are blurred.

Note bad

While the visuals are Tim Burton levels of beautiful, spindly-limbed monsters and all, a heartbreaking piano soundtrack skips along behind Pete as he journeys into madness and battles swathes of the monsters that lurk under the bed. Spiders, twisted creatures, and even rogue adults must fall to your barber's cut-throat razor. Yes, you're playing as a child with a lethal blade. While Once Upon A Coma fails every health and safety regulation, this looks like another labour of love from the exceptionally talented Brush. ■

"JOURNEY INTO THE FOREST TO FIND THE SOURCE OF THE SCREAMING"



If you were scared of Pete being all alone in this unsettling world, fret not. He's joined by his pet bird who'll probably be *fine*. It's Pete you need to worry about.



HOW WE SCORE

0-39 Awful Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
40-59 Poor Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
60-69 Decent A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
70-79 Good Some flaws, but still a very enjoyable experience.
80-89 Excellent Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
90-100 Outstanding A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system, in the same genre, and for the same format at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it...

GM GOLD AWARD Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.

Format Switch **Publisher** Nintendo **Developer** Monolith Soft **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 2

Nintendo Switch has its head in the clouds for a true clash of the titans



Someone at Monolith Soft must have a death wish. At the very least, some poor programmer wishes ill on his boss. The studio has made a career out of cramming impossibly ambitious worlds into the least ambitious of hardware. Xenoblade Chronicles 1 gave us a JRPG built on the literal shoulders of giants; Xenoblade Chronicles X had an alien planet that could only be sensibly navigated by flying mech. Now, on a console the size of a packet of biscuits, it gives us a cloud ocean populated by the world's largest zoo. Something has to give, right?

'Not obviously' would be the answer. The world of Alrest is another Monolith Soft classic. Here, nations squat on the backs of flying titans, living landmasses that are so vast that it's not until you zoom the camera right out that you realise you are exploring fields on the thigh of a gazelle, or shopping in a city *inside* the stomach of a whale. Fans of the first game might feel some déjà vu in the game's initial grassy stretch – Gormott is Gaur Plain, right down to the thumping drum on the soundtrack – but later destinations put a stop to that. One series of islands strewn across the bodies of intertwining jellyfish is exactly the kind of 'wow!' moment you hope for from the builders of Bionis.

Admittedly, much of what takes your breath away is achieved by opting for scale over specifics. Everything's slightly rough around the edges in close up, but you rarely look around your feet because you're gawping at the horizon. What is noticeable is the shift away from the total sandbox freedom of Xenoblade Chronicles X's Mira. To those who truly lost themselves on that alien world, the self-contained titans here are a step back; one of many simplifications bringing Chronicles 2 in line with the original game. It also suffers in Switch's handheld mode, losing not just size but resolution and colour, resulting in a disappointingly murky image. Not enough to stop you from grinding on the morning commute, but clearly inferior to blasting the game out on a TV.

> "WAITING TO SEE WHO POPS OUT OF A MAGIC ROCK IS LIKE A JRPG KINDER SURPRISE"

Tellblade

Shifting from an open world isn't the only U-turn from X. Storytelling is back in the spotlight, with big dollops of exposition waiting for you at every objective marker. And it's classic Xenoblade Chronicles fare: frantic anime clashes where magic swords seem to grow bigger by the minute, and 500 years of chewy backstory serve up enough shocking reveals to fill ten M Night Shyamalan flicks. Tonally, it's a return to everything we loved about Bionis, shifting from sterile sci-fi to warmhearted fantasy, complete with a lush orchestral score (none of X's abominable hip hop efforts here) and Skittles-coloured heroes replacing macho mercenaries.

It's also nice to have a proper hero, rather than a blank slate avatar. Rex may

Is it Reyn time? Sadly not, though Tora the Nopon does scratch that irritating sidekick itch.



You can dial back elements of the hectic interface, but there's no avoiding the fact that this is a very busy game.

not be Mr Charisma but, like Shulk before him, he's a suitably wide-eyed guide through Alrest's tangled politics. That said, his story is slower than Shulk's, with the first 15 hours playing out as a parade of mysterious faces with even more mysterious motivations and no great sense of direction. It doesn't help that Nopons – Xenoblade's answer to the Ewoks – feature heavily early on, assaulting your ears with helium nonsense. If it weren't for the fun twist on character development that he brings (see 'Burning Bright'), we'd have booted our Nopon out of the party long ago. Maybe off the titan itself.

Persevere and the story finds its footing, helped by the arrival of quirkier allies such as dour Scottish general, Morag, and Zeke, who is the embodiment of anime excess. That *sounds* dreadful, yes, but delivers big laughs. What really helps the yarn, and in turn the combat, is the concept of Drivers and Blades. Blades are living creatures that bond with Drivers and materialise as elementally-aligned weapons in their hands. Having mystic beasts bolster you into a badass is very Persona-like, the difference being that Blades don't just pop out to fight but are full members of your party. How refreshing to have equipment that you care about beyond a wall of stats, especially as you uncover the sadder details of their existence.

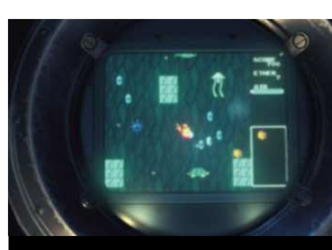
Crystal amazed

Each character has a signature Blade that can't be removed, but you fill your arsenal out with others collected from crystals. Waiting to see who pops out of a magic rock is like a JRPG Kinder Surprise and reminds you how much fun prizes could be before corporate suits stank out the joint with microtransactions. Xenoblade has none of that, dropping crystals so generously that you end up binning most common Blades simply to keep your inventory tidy. What you really want are the rare Blades, which are unique characters with bespoke voice acting and loyalty missions to unlock their full skill trees.

At the time of writing we're fighting alongside a giant polar bear, a demon with self-confidence issues, and something that is very nearly copyright infringement of Baymax from Big Hero 6. The point is, the random nature of the unlocks really does give your party a unique feel, and the inclusion of backstories, no matter how slight they are, elevate the rare blades above mere names on a checklist. You don't just want to catch 'em all, you want to meet 'em all, too. And when did you last think that about Trubbish?

Where Xenoblade does take a direct cue from Pokémon is using Blade abilities to push deeper into its knotty landscapes. Just as you cut, surf, and dig around Kanto, the right Blade combo can burn obstacles, say, or bound up cliff faces. Powers intensify as you bond with Blades (see 'Bond, Blade Bond'), which encourages you to try out new faces if you want to uncover acres of hidden territory. Xenoblade's exploration gets by on the sheer density of its world, but

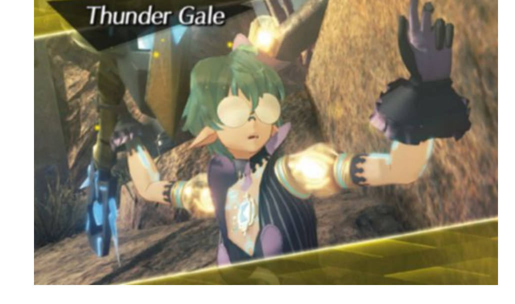
"WE FIGHT ALONGSIDE A POLAR BEAR, A DEMON, AND A CLONE OF BAYMAX FROM BIG HERO 6"



BURNING BRIGHT

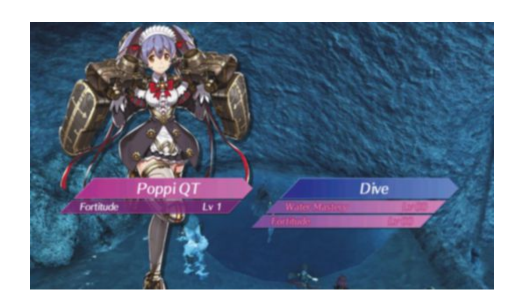
Gotta get down to get up

Unable to partner with Blades, Nopon Tora builds a sidekick called Poppi. Instead of finding new weapons he upgrades her, which is a game unto itself. Literally so: new parts are earned by playing an 8-bit diving game called Tiger Tiger. In it you descend Tora through monster-clogged tunnels, swiping treasure as you go. Clear out as many obstacles as you can on the way down, as once you nab the sea bed's treasure you can't defend yourself on the trip back. It's truly odd, not least because it allows a persistent player to level Poppi into an amazing killing machine early on. Whether you can endure that much Tiger Tiger is another matter…





Monsters with (daft) human names are extra tough, and you can summon them from the grave for a second pop.





Timed button presses litter combat. Hit them and the world 'excellent' pops up, which is always a good thing.

BOND, BLADE BOND

The only time it's really acceptable to enjoy a sworded affair

Each Blade's power is defined by its affinity with its user, dictated by a vast Affinity chart. Instead of levelling up with the usual XP, each orb is triggered by specific criteria, not unlike an Achievement or Trophy. You might have to pull off X number of a given attack, collect an aquarium's worth of fish, or feed the Blade a piece of cake. (Yes, swords eat cake in this world.) Rare Blades tend to be greatly limited until you discover their story – our demonic chum Wulfric, for example, needs to learn how not to scare children before he can, well, get better at scaring children.

A bit later in the game you gain the option to send groups of your unequipped Blades off on mercenary missions. This is a lot like managing your assassins in Assassin's Creed Brotherhood: as they complete missions they earn bonuses for your team (such as treasure and experience), but also begin to gain affinity without you needing to take them out in the field. Considering the large number of Blades you accrue through the story, and the fact you can only equip three at a time, it makes sense to send out as many unused ones as possible to maintain a healthy supply of high-level weapons to play. Also, because they open up tougher missions if they're successful, it means you're less likely to find obstacles that you can't get by. Plus, y'know, taking on missions is not just about what they'll do for you. Sometimes it's nice to support people who need mercenary help, right?

tying navigation to character development helps supercharge the whole affair. Instead of awarding abstract statistical boosts (although there are plenty of those, too) you get to go on more adventures; this is the stuff that will have your playtime pushing well past the hundred-hour mark.

All this is for nothing if the Blades don't play nice with Xenoblade's combat. As before, fights are real-time and largely automatic. You control one hero who auto-attacks, which charges up Blade 'arts'. This iteration simplifies things by limiting each Blade to three arts and a special, each mapped to a face button. By removing the clumsier move menu (which had you scrolling through nine attacks) you're free to focus on positioning, timing, and combos. Movement now includes running over to health potions when they drop, as well as attacking exposed flanks. And timing an art to interrupt an auto-attack speeds up the rate your specials charge. And the specials themselves can be stacked – mixing fire and earth moves into a mini volcano, say, or boiling beasts with a steamy fire and water cocktail.

That's the simple version. There are also chain attacks, art combos, elemental debuffs, team attacks… for a game with just four moves at any given time, it's ludicrous how much is built on them. Exploiting this hodge-podge of interlocking parts is thrilling, but takes dedication. Even with its ideas introduced at a glacial pace – tutorial screens keep coming after 20 hours – they're not always clearly explained and there's no way of revisiting the lessons. That this iffy teacher chooses a monster playground as his classroom doesn't help; trying to learn the basics as level 90 brutes kill you with a sneeze is a poor introduction to the world. It sends the message that curiosity is bad, in a land begging to be explored. Take our advice and stick to the story path early on – it leaves you far better equipped to enjoy the world proper later on.

50 Blades of slay

Visually, combat can be too much – so many numbers and words are flashing on the screen it makes more sense to stare at the recharge bars in the bottom corner as that's the only bit that directly involves you. A team of three Driver/Blades means that there at least six characters in the fight; meet three other Drivers and there are 12 moving parts. Again, you do learn to interpret it – you can learn to interpret most things over the course of 80 hours – but it only takes a slur of slowdown or the camera failing to frame a special attack to remind you that Monolith Soft has maybe dialled it up too much. You have to remember that Xenoblade Chronicles X only came out two years ago – would anyone have begrudged the team a few more months to sand down rough edges?

That said, what it's achieved in the past two years puts most studios to shame. A world this big, this stuffed with ideas, story, and characters, not to mention hours of majestic music… it may end Switch's staggering debut year on an uneven note, but this is still one of the best JRPGs we've played since… well, the last Xenoblade. Think of it like this: in the time it took Final Fantasy XV to come to fruition, Monolith Soft put out three whole games – each one bigger, bolder, and, arguably, far more complete, than our Eos roadtrip. Xenoblade has established itself as one of the staples of the modern RPG scene, and we can't wait to see what Monolith does next, on what tech. A whole galaxy powered by a Casio calculator? For these wizards, anything is possible. ■

GM LOVES…



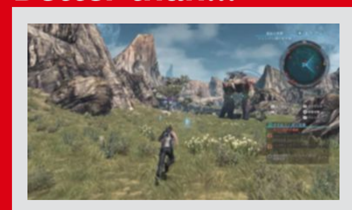
- ✔ Who wouldn't want to fight evil on top of a giant jellyfish?
- ✔ You'll be exploring and collecting Blades for months.

GM HATES…



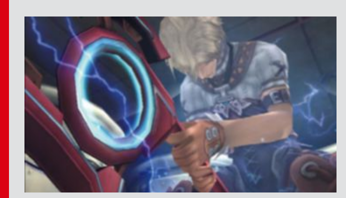
- ✘ It could explain itself better to new (and forgetful) players.
- ✘ Handheld mode is a severe downgrade from TV play.

Better than…



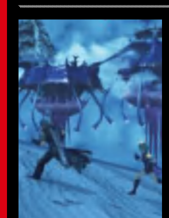
Xenoblade Chronicles X
We revelled in one of the most enormous alien worlds committed to polygons, but the hard edge made it tough to truly love.

Worse than…



Xenoblade Chronicles
You never forget exploring your first Monolith Soft world – and the upbeat Gaur Plains theme is still the best Xeno-tune going.

NEED TO KNOW



As in the original game, the cast is largely voiced with British accents, although a day one patch lets you play in Japanese if the sound of a Yorkshire hero is too much of an affront to you.

GM JUDGEMENT





An uneven start makes way for another Monolith monster full of life, loot and landmass.
Matthew Castle

When in doubt, smash stuff. And you don't need to be controlling She-Hulk to do it – though she's playable.









Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** Warner Brothers **Developer** TT Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

LEGO MARVEL SUPER HEROES 2

Will the series Lego of its tried and tested ideas?



The first iconic vehicle that we unlock is Ghost Rider's bike. Rebels that we are, we have Spider-Man ride it. With geeky snorts of laughter at how daring and off-the-wall we are, we roar through the streets on our new ride. Well, not so much 'roar', as 'trundle'. Oh dear.

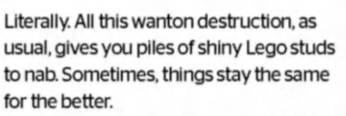
This whole promise unfulfilled thing – potential not quite reached – permeates the entire experience. The setup is full of so much potential, the abstract concept almost solidifies and leaks out of the corners of our TV. Kang The Conqueror (played by Peter Serafinowicz, who is clearly enjoying himself) has cherry-picked chunks of reality from across all of time and space to create a city of his own that he calls 'Chronopolis'. He's so evil, he probably didn't even request planning permission from the local council.

Marvel fans like a good crossover, and this game offers the *mother* of all crossovers. The story and the hub world alike offer locations and characters from – among others – Marvel Noir, Inhumans, Thor, Black Panther, and even 1872 (the spin-off which reimagined some classic characters in the Wild West). This results in sights such as, much to our amusement, an ancient Egyptian driving a car in modern Manhattan.

Kang I kick it?

This is a Lego game, so it's still very much about Breaking All The Things. Seem to be stuck in a room? Smash stuff up until you're not. Missing pieces to a puzzle? Smash things to bits until you uncover some buildable bricks. Enemies giving you grief? Break them down. Literally. All this wanton destruction, as usual, gives you piles of shiny Lego studs to nab. Sometimes, things stay the same for the better.

One difference noticeable right from the opening stage, where The Guardians Of The Galaxy are desperately trying to avoid a crash landing, is the surprisingly dramatic and cinematic presentation given to the story levels. This can lead to difficulty in locating your character on-screen on rare occasions; but overall, it helps to keep things jogging along at a nice pace.



The context to all the punching, building, shooting, and (very simplistic) puzzling is steeped in the extended Marvel universe and, while it has many a nod and several winks, doesn't go far enough. The story is exclusive to the game, and fortunately doesn't take itself too seriously (as Lego Marvel Avengers did). There's many a laugh to be had, and we in effect take a whistle-stop tour of many corners of the MCU. We meet the Noir incarnation of Spider-Man, and help him take down Wilson Fisk; help free Hulk from his obedience disk on Sakaar; join Black Panther in a battle against Man-Ape; and enjoy plenty of other nerdtastic encounters.

Only briefly touching on elements of Marvel lore is forgivable within the story, largely because there's a detailed,

overarching narrative holding everything together. Once we get out into the free-roaming hub world, however, the cracks are immediately apparent. The freedom afforded by flying characters is just as enjoyable as it was in the first LMSH, and having snippets of multiple worlds available to explore is, on the surface, exciting. Knowhere, Asgard, future New York, and medieval England in one game? We should be screaming "squee!" at the tops of our voices and doing a silly little dance. Somehow, however, we're not.

A little slice of Wakanda, for example, should surely celebrate the technological advances, traditions, and fearsome warriors of Black Panther's home. K'un-Lun has the Iron Fist background to explore. Attilan harbours all the twists and turns of the Inhumans. You'll often meet characters that the story didn't have room for, and they'll give you something to do, or even accompany you while you do it. And yet... you'll rarely see or do anything that couldn't be seen or done anywhere else. There *are* plenty of puzzles and some neat surprises. However, past or future, sandy desert or underwater, too many of the side-quests are identikit traditional Lego tasks such as taking out a series of goons, building objects and pushing switches, or a disappointingly slow checkpoint race.

But hold your horses of disappointment, because there's still lots to be enjoyed. As previously mentioned, there are some good gags within the story levels, and there are many others to be found across Chronopolis. The medieval England section is a great example of this. It's full of American

BUILDING CHARACTER

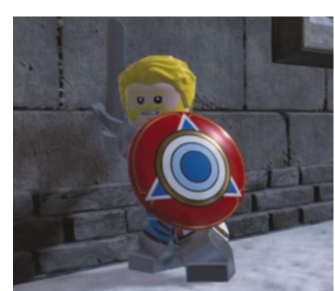
If there's one thing Lego's good for...

With literally hundreds of heroes and villains, it's going to be tricky to know which ones are worthy of your time. But fear not! We're here to highlight five of the best, and explain why they have the GM seal of approval.

1 Black Bolt's voice is so powerful, a mere whisper causes devastation. A five-year-old child in super hero form.



2 What would happen if Carnage and Venom melded? Carnom would happen. He needs to become canon.



3 An alternate universe version of Captain America, Captain Avalon has a sword – and an awesome 'tache.



4 He may look like Ant McPartlin, but Hammerhead is actually rubbish at presenting TV shows.



5 Super-stretchy Ms Marvel is a solid choice for fights, with great reach and the ability to make herself huge.

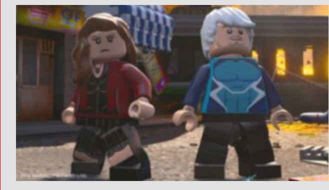
GM LOVES...

- The sheer volume of characters to play as is wonderful.
- Jokes don't always work, but when they do, they're brilliant.

GM HATES...

- More bugs should've been squished before release.
- A few too many rentaquests outside the story levels.

Better than...



Lego Marvel's Avengers
With a baffling determination to ape the massively successful movies, the last Lego Marvel game largely lost sight of the 'game' bit.

Worse than...



Lego Marvel Super Heroes
There's not too much in it but, with a better hub world and a little more craziness, the original wins.

DLC



Fancy buying yet another season pass? Get the one for LMSH 2, and you'll eventually have six level packs and four character packs. That's 60 new characters (for a total of almost 300).

"THIS WHOLE PROMISE UNFULFILLED THING PERMEATES THE ENTIRE EXPERIENCE"

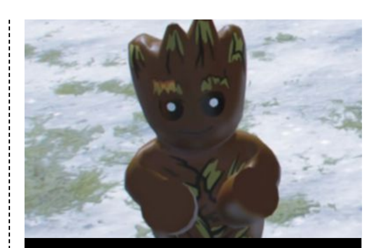
actors putting on dodgy British accents, something the script gleefully admits to by having NPCs break character now and again (and also by including a great nod to Overwatch).

Hulk smashed

Sadly, the technical issues we come across cannot be ignored. The game crashes on us a few times (the blow softened by regular autosaves), and the frame rate issues – although almost completely absent from the tightly contained story levels – are an established, if unwelcome, Lego game tradition (and they're slightly worse with a second player). We also find, a few times, that one or other of our Lego heroes is in the undignified position of being stuck on an unfriendly piece of window dressing. We find a way to force the character back into action each time, but we shouldn't have to.

Elsewhere, the new Battle Arenas now allow up to four people to play together. In keeping with the game's theme, this isn't quite as exciting as it might sound. There are no 'proper' levels, just cramped spaces for modes that are initially amusing but quickly lose their appeal.

The bottom line is that we have conflicting feelings about this. Make no mistake, there's a great deal of fun for people of all ages. This is one of the best Lego games so far, enjoyable even if you're not much of a Marvel fan. If you *are* a Marvel fan, then with well over 200 characters to unlock – not to mention the many examples of references and ideas that hit home perfectly – you'll get even more enjoyment out of it. You'll be pleased with your purchase... as long as you're willing to tolerate some rough edges and unrealised ambitions. ■



SHIFT HAPPENS

Let's do the time warp

Kang's not the only person who can selfishly mess with the fabric of reality. You can do it too! In the game, anyway.

At strictly determined points, sorcerer Doctor Strange can switch objects between their past and future states to solve puzzles. Even better, you can have Groot jump between baby and full-grown versions at will; useful for progress as well as entertainment.

GM JUDGEMENT

72%

It doesn't build on the formula (ha!) much, but it's one of the best – if least technically stable – entries.
Luke Kemp

Why did Peter Parker get excited when he saw somebody in the distance? Because he spied a man.

GM **Review** *The Final Verdict!*

Nope, that's not a Rayman mod; get used to those disembodied hands. It beats spaghetti arms, we suppose.

ONLY ON PSVR

Format PS4 **Publisher** Bethesda Softworks **Developer** Bethesda Game Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM VR

You were never an adventurer like this

Perched atop some snowy crag, gazing into the distance, or perhaps following the course of some babbling brook with your head as it trickles down the mountainside – in moments like these, Skyrim VR is breathtaking. It's always had a weighty sense of place, but virtual reality allows you to inhabit Tamriel's locales like never before. Unfortunately, when it comes to moving from your scenic perch for a bit of exploration, the illusion shatters.

Going for a recce across Skyrim's vast world is as tantalising as it was in 2011, with the sense that something exciting exists just around the corner never abating. Here, though, you have two options when moving around: the nausea-inducing control stick option, which plays much like vanilla Skyrim with bonus vomiting, or the much better PS Move option, which relies on the point-and-teleport mechanic that's proved effective in other VR titles. The problem is, while moving around a room with that method works well, travelling long distances or zipping around during combat is disorienting and cumbersome.

A fiddly control mapping makes things even less intuitive, and though you will eventually adapt, it's never elegant. A side effect of the teleportation is you can sometimes zap yourself directly ahead of a moving NPC, which causes you to be shunted out of the way in a sickening out-of-body experience. Glitchy moments are far from gone, and here they're occasionally more queasy than quirky. The only area of movement that's seen improvement is the map screen, in which you soar above the landscape, peering down at areas of interest.

If traversal is wonky, you might fear for Skyrim's already dodgy combat, but it holds up well. The fact that you're actually making the action of swinging an axe covers a multitude of design sins by tricking you into believing you're really clobbering that Draug to death. Again, it's inelegant, and control troubles can frustrate, but it's good fun, though the novelty does wane over time. Magic, in particular, tickles the power-fantasy part of the brain – thrusting your hands forwards and unleashing fire upon your foes is seriously satisfying.

Reach for the sky

Underneath all the VR gubbins, Skyrim remains the game you now and love. It's not as pretty as the HD update, or even the Switch version, with textures and draw distances sacrificed to cram it into virtual reality. The animatronic, Play-doh-faced denizens of Tamriel look even worse when you can get up close and personal, but Skyrim's always had its rough edges, and a few new ugly moments do little to change its feel. It's not the definitive way to experience this classic, and it raises questions about the viability of big, open-word games in VR, but there's something undeniably magical about exploring this familiar world in a totally new way. ■

"TRAVELLING LONG DISTANCES OR ZIPPING AROUND DURING COMBAT IS DISORIENTING"

Is Skyrim a bit of a slog when playing in short VR bursts? It can start to Drag-on

GM LOVES...


Just poking around the world feels fresh all over again.

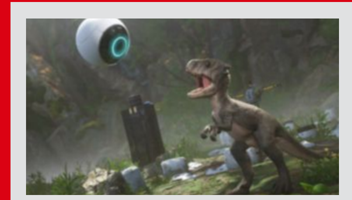

Motion controls make combat surprisingly immersive.

GM HATES...

Graphically, the HD release looks considerably more polished.

Wrestling with the controls in frantic moments can irritate.

Better than...



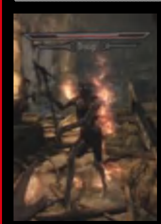
Robinson: The Journey
This beautiful virtual reality experience might have Skyrim VR beaten on looks, but there's little of substance beneath them.

Worse than...



Batman: Arkham VR
While they share the point-and-teleport control scheme, it's much less fiddly when you're sleuthing rather than swordfighting.

NEED TO KNOW

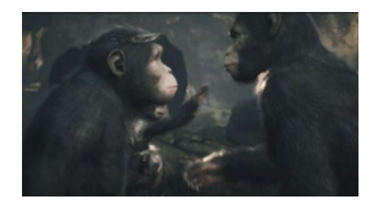

As well as the main game, Skyrim VR includes the Dawnguard, Hearthfire, and Dragonborn add-ons, which boost an already expansive game into something ginormous.

GM JUDGEMENT

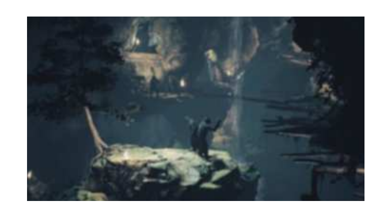
78%


Your brain will realise that it's imperfect and messy, but it's bound to set your heart aflutter.
Alex Jones

Imaginarium's magic touch is evident in the facial expressions of the apes. Same can't be said for the humans.







Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Pub** The Imaginarium **Dev** The Imaginati Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

PLANET OF THE APES: LAST FRONTIER

An evolutionary dead-end of interactive fiction



With each new game in the interactive fiction genre, the task of keeping up the illusion of choice gets harder for developers. Where once we were wowed by the idea that our decisions had life-or-death consequences and fretted over the unforeseeable effects of our actions, today we're more attuned; we spot their bluffs whether we want to or not. Alas, Planet Of The Apes: Last Frontier, set in the world of the blockbuster movie franchise, is not a great bluffer, like a chimp trying to pass as a human by wearing a fake nose and glasses.

Last Frontier has a novel hook, namely that you control a character on either side of the human-primate divide after the Simian Flu has wiped out most of humanity. On the one hand there is Bryn, a noble member of an ape tribe whose bellicose brother ascends to the throne after their father's death. Then there is Jess, who leads a township of human survivors scraping a living off the harsh plains at the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

Bryn and bear it

Bryn is a like-for-like stand-in for top ape Caesar from the movies. His furrowed face – like those of the other apes – looks more alive, more emotionally human, than the humans in the game; a reflection of the fact that this is published by the studio behind the special effects of the movies. Jess and the humans are not so fortunate, responding to crucial decisions with the conviction and glazed-eyed appearance of mannequins.

The idea to show both sides of the ape-human conflict is sound, and in keeping with the theme of the movies, but it begets its own problems. When Bryn first reaches out to the humans, for instance, Jess (controlled by you) has every reason to be suspicious of him, but you as the player know he's trustworthy because you *are* him as well. Your omniscient perspective undermines the intended suspense of such scenes, reducing your responses to formalities, rather than genuine dilemmas.

Even on a more basic level, Last Frontier has problems with player agency. It's clear within seconds of each binary choice you make that it's arbitrary. Don't want to let the cowboys into your town? Overruled! Want to go around the mountain? Nope, we're going through the mine (did we learn nothing from Lord Of The Rings?). At one point, you can spare a human or shoot him, but either way death swiftly catches up with him.

The story is ruthlessly linear, offering little leeway and none of the intriguing tangents that made The Walking Dead a success, let alone the life-and-death thrills of Until Dawn. These games engage the player, conjuring tricks to keep up the illusion or even give you control over outcomes, but Last Frontier doesn't use any of them, forcing us along a set path (with a few alternative endings) that feels like a drab simulacrum of the films.

The multiplayer, where up to four people can make decisions-by-committee using phones (via PlayLink) and controllers, is a great idea, but its execution slows down an already slogging story as each trivial decision turns into an unnecessary point of debate. Where other games in this genre are walking on two feet, Last Frontier is decidedly primitive by comparison. ■

"IT'S CLEAR WITHIN SECONDS OF EACH BINARY CHOICE YOU MAKE THAT IT'S ARBITRARY"

What trusted proverb sums up your level of interaction with this game? Let The Chimps Fall Where They May

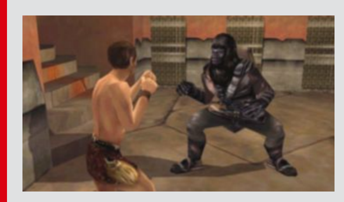
GM LOVES...

- The ape faces are nice and expressive, true to the movies.
- The multiplayer feature deserves to be built on.

GM HATES...

- It swiftly becomes clear that your choices are meaningless.
- There's little interactivity, beyond mundane dialogue options.

Better than...



Planet of the Apes (2001)
Last Frontier is better than this PS1 action-game tie-in to the 2001 movie, though lacks its schlocky charm.

Worse than...



The Walking Dead series
Unlike Last Frontier, Telltale's The Walking Dead fills its post-apocalyptic setting with moral dilemmas, tragedies, and convincing characters.

NEED TO KNOW



We experienced bad background texture rendering and pop-in at the start of many scenes, with textures taking a good few seconds to appear. Hopefully they're fixable, because they are a deal-breaker.

GM JUDGEMENT





Barely interactive, and fails to capture the suspense and nuance of superior games in the genre.
Robert Zak

It's always nice when your unlocked victory poses line up. It's nice to win too, of course.

Format PC **Publisher** Stunlock Studios **Developer** Stunlock Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-6

BATTLERITE

In its latest brawler, Stunlock Studios does battle... correctly



Remember that giddy period at the start of the decade when it seemed like everybody was making a MOBA? Only a few of them worked out, but Bloodline Champions was one. Now the people behind it are back with one of the best competitive action-RPGs in years, a free, fun, and deep arena combat game.

Battlerite has the look of a MOBA, but it takes plenty of its DNA from shooters and fighting games. Your hero is controlled from above using the WASD keys and mouse – a little like playing a twin-stick shooter on PC – with abilities fired off using hotkeys like in an MMORPG. Fighting in teams of two or three, your goal is to work with your allies to eliminate the enemy team. Slain heroes don't respawn: matches are played in short, bloody rounds, with the first team to win three rounds winning the match overall.

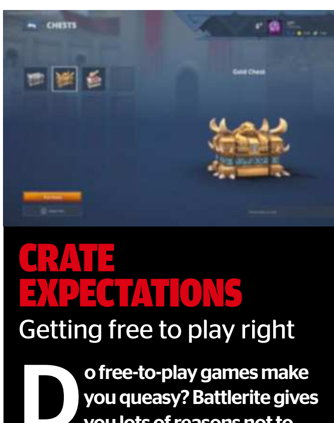
Heroes vary tremendously, but they share a few common characteristics. You'll have some kind of rapid movement ability bound to the space bar: this might be a leap, teleport, or dash. You'll also have a defensive power bound to Q: some characters turn invisible, some shift into a different plane, and others – typically the burly, frontline-fighter types – have the ability to counter incoming attacks and trigger a retaliatory effect. Anybody who strikes the warrior Freya during her counter window, for example, is dragged into range of her hammers. Striking sci-fi sharpshooter Destiny during *her* counter window, however, results in her leaping into the air to deliver an aerial bombardment.

Limit break

Characters also have special attacks and ultimate abilities, but unlike a MOBA these don't consume mana – in fact, there's no mana system whatsoever. Instead, Battlerite uses an energy mechanic that is much closer to Street Fighter. Landing attacks and abilities builds up energy. A full bar of energy can be spent to trigger your character's ultimate (think of it like a fighting game super attack) or chunks can be spent on either special attacks or EX variants of your basic abilities. Time for another example: the gunslinger Jade can snipe enemies with her alt-fire to inflict a short stun, or invest a chunk of energy into an EX version of the same attack that inflicts a longer rooting effect. Knowing exactly how and when to invest the energy you've built up is the sort of thing that takes hours of practice.

More complexity is created by the arenas themselves. These are, at first glance, relatively simple spaces: usually comprising a large central area flanked by a labyrinth of walls and cover. Every 20 seconds, an orb spawns in the centre of the arena. Members of the team that lands the killing blow on the orb receive an instant boost to their health and energy, but achieving it usually means occupying the most exposed space on the map. Around the sides of the map are smaller health and energy pickups, but controlling these means giving up on the

"HAS THE LOOK OF A MOBA, BUT IT TAKES PLENTY OF ITS DNA FROM SHOOTERS AND FIGHTING GAMES"



CRATE EXPECTATIONS

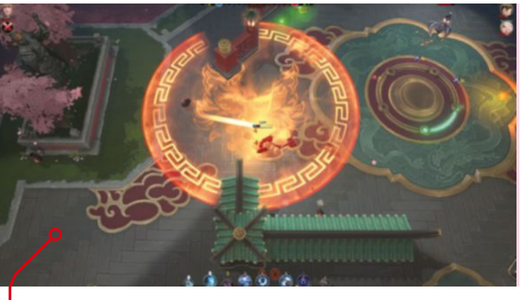
Getting free to play right

Do free-to-play games make you queasy? Battlerite gives you lots of reasons not to worry. There are, indeed, loot chests, but there's nothing in them that you can't unlock through regular play, and nothing that impacts gameplay in any way. Not having access to every character might limit your ability to practise, but Stunlock offers a one-off £24 'All Champions Pack' that nets you all current and future characters. Basically, your options are to play for free or spend a little less than the price of a full game to unlock everything you'll need: there's no pressure to keep spending money beyond that if you don't want to.





Last-stand one-on-ones can be very tense for spectators. That Death Vortex is closing in!



You'll learn to anticipate enemy ultimates. That isn't what is happening here, however. This one wasn't anticipated.

much more valuable orb. With only two or three players on a team, developing an effective strategy to control the whole map is a strategic challenge all by itself. Oh, and note: when the match timer runs out, a 'Death Vortex' begins to funnel players towards the centre of the arena for a final showdown.

These are very rich pickings if you have even the slightest interest in competitive team strategy. There's loads of room for you to improve both individually and as a team, and there are plenty of opportunities for you to express clutch decision-making and twitch skill. The time it takes to really get to know a hero means that, like in a fighting game, you're likely to focus on a single 'main' for a big chunk of your time. Getting a feel for how a character works is deeply rewarding, with loads of combos and tricks to discover.

For example: a beginner Freya player will probably focus on simply landing Storm Mace accurately: it's a skillshot where she flings a hammer in a straight line, and you've got to lead your target if you're going to score a hit. When it connects, it does a little bit of damage and pushes your opponent back. If you manage to bash somebody into a wall, it triggers a powerful incapacitate effect – but this is hard to do given the limited knockback. If Storm Mace hits an enemy affected by Freya's passive power Static, however, then the knockback is much more substantial. So how do you trigger Static? One way is to trigger her Electric Shield as an enemy attack sails in, countering the opponent and dragging them towards you. After a few hours, that now more experienced Freya player is using Electric Shield to drag enemies out of position and then using Storm Mace to bash them into walls. This is just one combo, and one character, out of a cast of (currently) 21.

School of hard knocks

If it sounds complicated, well – it is. As is normal with both MOBAs and fighting games, you can only expect to be so good when you first start playing. Battlerite has a well-engineered tutorial, however, that'll encourage you to get out of your shell and start experimenting with those EX abilities. You can also practice with characters against training dummies and bots to your heart's content, and teaming up with another player to take on the AI is a good way to develop your skills without being exposed to the unforgiving landscape of actual multiplayer.

Stunlock Studios has made loads of smart decisions about competitive play. You always pick your character before you queue, so there's no anxiety about being pushed into taking on a role you're not ready to play. Battlerite also calculates your rank both as an individual and with specific combinations of friends – not just groups in general – which means that you get matchmade, on the whole, pretty intelligently.

We also need to mention one small but crucial thing – your teammates are always muted by default. These games have a problem with toxicity that is beyond the powers of any one developer to fix – and some spend a lot of time and effort trying to. Battlerite turns chat into something that you'll never see unless you explicitly volunteer for it.

That's Battlerite all over: a series of clever choices that come together to form an impressive contribution to the competitive gaming arena. This might be an indie game, but it is punching far, far above its weight class. ■

Is there anything saltier than competitive gaming? Gaet'ale pond in Ethiopia is the world's saltiest body of water. But no, there isn't.

GM LOVES...

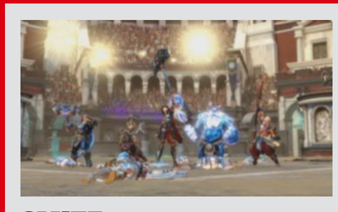


- A brilliant blend of MOBA strategy and fighting game skill.
- The free-to-play model is refreshingly generous.

GM HATES...

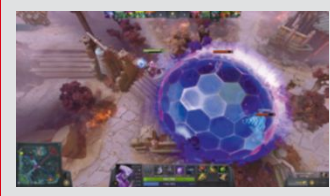
- The learning curve's steep and matchmaking's unforgiving.
- Muting teammates by default doesn't stop them rage-quitting.

Better than...



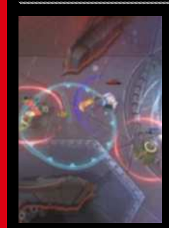
SMITE
Hi-Rez's mythological MOBA has plenty of charm, but its five-on-five Arena mode can't match Battlerite for depth and complexity.

Worse than...



Dota 2
Valve's recently-revamped MOBA opus now has more options for fast play. It's still staggeringly complex, however, and a much bigger time investment.

NEED TO KNOW



If you're having trouble winning games, consider sticking closely to your allies. Nothing can make you a better player except more practice, but there's always safety in numbers.

GM JUDGEMENT





Opens up a world of team action to a new audience while being an ace competitive game in its own right.
Chris Thursten



Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** Electronic Arts **Developer** EA DICE **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-40

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

A surprise to be sure, but an uneven one

Remember the days when you'd set up all your Star Wars action figures on the iiving room carpet on Christmas Day? That's what the reboot of Star Wars Battlefront felt like back in 2015, introducing more grandiose battles than ever could have been envisioned during the series' first run. Two years later, Battlefront II works to quell the largely casual appeal of the first game, adding more maps, characters, and even a single-player campaign into the mix. But akin to a certain Imperial director, it's hampered by a progression system that often chokes on its aspirations.

The first thing you notice is just how good the whole thing looks. Compared to the first Battlefront, the environments are more varied, textures are more richly detailed, and everything you do is complemented by an authentic soundtrack of blaster bolts, explosions, and a fleeting orchestral score. Simply put, no Star Wars game has ever looked or sounded this good.

The ground combat remains diverse and satisfying too, with four different classes all offering unique traits. It's a good idea to pick a Heavy class when engaging in close-quarters combat, for example, whereas the Specialist option is tailor-made for picking out enemies with long-range sniping. Regardless of which class you choose, the game continues to make short work of players who commit to situations all guns blazing, accurately conveying the illusion of playing a small role in an epic battle.

You don't always want to blend into the background though, and that's where Battle Points come in. This system replaces the random token mechanic from 2015's game, allowing you to acquire mid-match reward points to make use of special troopers, vehicles, and (most importantly) classic Star Wars heroes. Playing the objective and scoring hits is the best way to rack up your Battle Points, but with varying costs for different characters, spending them demands a tactical approach.

This has its pros and cons, as while it makes for a more varied and intelligent system than before, it also alienates less skilled players. Saving up enough points to acquire a lightsaber-wielding hero in the game's primary Galactic Assault mode requires a string of kills at the least, and even then there's no guarantee the game will last long enough to incorporate them. The Force is indeed calling to you – but only if you're skilled enough to wield it.

GM CERTIFIED GM CERTIFIED
★GM★
CERTIFIED
100% INDEPENDENT REVIEWS SINCE 1993

> “SIMPLY PUT, NO STAR WARS GAME HAS EVER LOOKED OR SOUNDED THIS GOOD”

Rebel scum

Battlefront II marks the first title in the rebooted series in which you can embark on a single-player campaign. It follows Iden Versio – an Imperial commander whose world is turned upside down following the destruction of the second Death Star. Her tale takes place during

How do the Gungans store their Booma weapons? They put them in jar jars.


DEFEAT THE FIRST ORDER
750

As before, nearly all of Battlefront II can be played in a first-person or third-person view.

the period between Return Of The Jedi and The Force Awakens, making for a canon-altering take on events from a unique point of view.

Versio's chapters are broken up with side-missions in which you take control of heroes such as Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Lando Calrissian. It's not as jarring as you'd think – most fit into both Iden's story and the Star Wars mythos – but ultimately they wrestle the focus from Iden and her Inferno Squad team members (who wouldn't rather be Han, eh?). Because of this, it's tough to feel for most of the new characters throughout the five- to six-hour campaign, despite the gorgeous cutscenes, clever writing, and faithful story elements. Engaging in all-out warfare remains appealing, but you never really care that deeply about Versio's plight.

The result is a campaign that leans too heavily on fan service. Its early moments are plagued by rinse-and-repeat missions that serve little purpose other than to extend the campaign, but stick with it, and you'll find the last few chapters come into their own. The cliffhanger may even leave you wanting more (oh, *hello* DLC!), but likely craving a more focused single-player approach akin to the Jedi Knight series of Star Wars games.

Great shot, kid

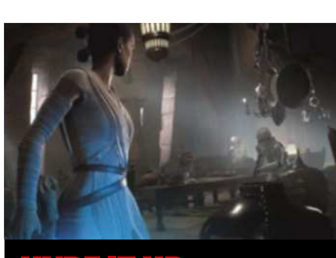
Despite the existence of a campaign, multiplayer remains at the heart of Battlefront II. Here, you'll find fewer game modes than in 2015's Battlefront – the fat has been trimmed away, leaving a lean, more muscular game. Of the five options Galactic Assault and Starfighter Assault have the most appeal.

The former is the game's primary offering. In it, 40 players engage in vast battles while simultaneously meeting a series of objectives. It replaces the Walker Assault mode of two years ago, having a more diverse range of tasks and forcing you to utilise its maps to their full potential, which makes you feel as though you're engaging in the ultimate Star Wars experience. At its best, Galactic Assault looks and sounds so spectacular, you'll become completely immersed in the action.

It only adds to the game's appeal that all three Star Wars movie eras are represented this time around, with planets such as Attack Of The Clones' Kamino and The Force Awakens' Takodana featuring on a hefty list of well-designed maps. You'll find yourself battling amid the sandy huts of Mos Eisley before defending a vicious onslaught in the Theed Royal Palace, and the sheer awe that you feel in these moments propels Galactic Assault to unforgettable heights.

Starfighter Assault is equally impressive, combining full-on space battles with unique sets of objectives. The core mechanics of flying remain intact, but have been enhanced, and now you'll find yourself having to weave in and out of impressive set pieces to achieve your goals. This more complex approach gives the mode greater longevity, and it should appeal for longer than 2015's Fighter Squadron.

"THE CAMPAIGN'S EARLY MOMENTS ARE PLAGUED BY RINSE-AND-REPEAT MISSIONS"



HYPE IT UP, FUZZBALL

A DLC feast to tie in with The Last Jedi

It's the most wonderful time of the year! Not Christmas – Star Wars season. As you'd expect, December's Battlefront II DLC focuses heavily on new film, The Last Jedi. EA is committed to providing free content updates, and thereare some fab additions heading our way in December. Finn and Captain Phasma join the list of in-game heroes, as does Tallie Lintra's RZ-2 A-Wing starfighter ship. There are two new maps, too, with Crait and D'Qar featuring in the Galactic Assault and Starfighter Assault modes respectively.





The campaign's early stages take place during Return Of The Jedi's timeline, but from the Empire's viewpoint.





You can actually see Kamino's rain bounce off the ship's windows in Starfighter Assault.



YOU'RE A REAL HERO

Meet the classic characters

There's nothing more exciting than taking control of Star Wars' most renowned heroes and villains in Battlefront II. Their dominant nature lends to a feeling of invincibility on the battlefront, but there are 16 to choose from (and more expected in due time), and you'll need to master the abilities of each one.

Of the current selection, half return from the first Battlefront. Some characters, such as Boba Fett and Han Solo, are playable from day one, but you'll have to pay an unlock fee to use Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, Chewbacca, and Emperor Palpatine in multiplayer.

Battlefront II introduces both prequel and sequel trilogy characters to the series, too. This means you can wield a double-bladed lightsaber as Episode I's Darth Maul, while the menacing Kylo Ren features alongside Rey, Finn (DLC), and Captain Phasma (also DLC) as representatives of the most recent set of films. You can even fly with Poe Dameron and his chirpy chum BB-8 in Starfighter Assault mode, which offers up its own set of classic ships.

The game rewards you with a hefty selection of credits for completing campaign mode, which you can then use to unlock a multiplayer variant of its protagonist, Iden Versio. The only notable absentee from the game's list of heroes and villains is the legendary Jar Jar Binks, who, for the second time in a row, is nowhere to be seen. How wude!

Of the other modes, Blast and Strike focus on close-quarters and objective-based combat respectively, and while they're welcome side-attractions, they aren't quite layered or complex enough to hold your attention. The same can be said for Heroes Vs Villains, although its unique concept of isolating classic characters in 4v4 battles doesn't grow old quite so quickly.

And for those moments when boredom sets in, there's an Arcade mode which features both local single-player and multiplayer options, integrating specific scenarios as well as a custom matchmaker. The latter is particularly enticing, as it allows you to embark on tailor-made bot battles across a handful of environments. Despite the limited range of options available, the mode does a reasonable job of providing a casual, tutorial-like sandbox.

It's a trap

Now for the dark side. All of Battlefront II's online multiplayer elements are affected by a brand-new progression system, which had already been tweaked by the time we got our review copy of the game. You upgrade using Star Cards – ability-enhancing add-ons that vary in type and effectiveness. You get them in loot crates, which you can buy with credits you've earned in-game. When the game launched the option to purchase them with real money was included; this caused such a backlash from the gaming community it was removed – and remains unavailable as of the writing of this review. (Read more on p12.)

The problem with Battlefront II's Star Card system is that it negatively affects gameplay, requiring you to open as many loot crates as possible to gain an edge in battle. Even when you buy one, there's no guarantee you'll get what you want, as their contents are random, leaving you with rewards you may have little use for.

This type of approach is nothing new, but here its sheer invasiveness leaves a sour taste in the mouth. Player skill continues to play a significant role, but with cards granting boosts to Blast Points, recharge times, and even health gains, it doesn't take much to feel like you're being cheated by the system. With no alternative but to engage with Star Cards and loot crates in multiplayer, detractors are left with nowhere to turn.

The system puts measures in place to ensure players don't progress too quickly, locking certain upgrades behind various level systems. However, it also restricts the various heroes and villains behind credit limits, forcing you to cash-in hard-earned rewards on characters you'd expect to be available from day one. It's a system that never emits any kind of charm, regardless of how many cards, credits, crafting parts, or character items you unlock.

The trade-off for this can be found in the game's roadmap of free DLC. Unlike 2015's game, Battlefront II players will be able to enjoy free maps, characters, and other elements throughout the game's lifespan, on top of an already feature-filled package. It's a welcome luxury that should see the game expand to new heights over the next 12 months, but the jury remains out as to whether it'll win over a disgruntled audience.

The presence of loot crates can't truly derail the excitement of engaging in gorgeous recreations of the Star Wars battles. Almost everything about Battlefront II feels bigger and better than its previous incarnation, and it's such a shame that it suffers the weight of an inept progression system. It's clear that the game has masses of potential. Here's hoping with the DLC and further tweaks, it lives up to it. ■

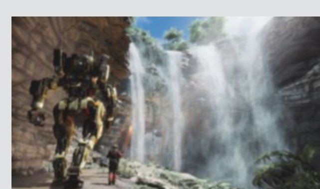
GM LOVES...

- It's an incredibly faithful take on the world of Star Wars.
- The multiplayer modes are both varied and thrilling.

GM HATES...

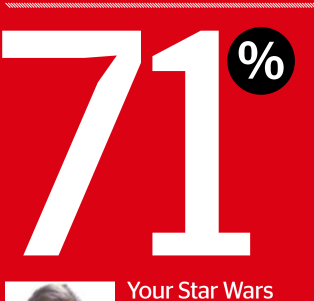
- The progression system is flawed to say the least.
- The single-player campaign suffers from a lack of focus.

Better than...



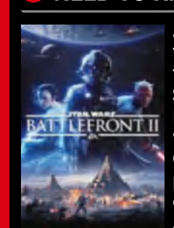
Kinect Star Wars
Han Solo's dance-off in Kinect Star Wars reminded us of the old adage, "hate leads to suffering". We'd rather be frozen in carbonite.

Worse than...



Titanfall 2
A standout campaign and balanced sense of progression mean Respawn's superb sequel triumphs over Battlefront II.

NEED TO KNOW



A prequel storyline to the campaign can be found in the book, Star Wars Battlefront II: Inferno Squad. It's written by Christie Golden, and takes place following the events of Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.

GM JUDGEMENT

71%



Your Star Wars fantasy made real, wrapped around a poorly-designed progression system.
Fraser Gilbert

GM **Review** *The Final Verdict!*

Cooking meets Columns in the gem-based puzzle sections.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?
Recipes for success

While focusing on the puzzling might mean you overlook what it is you're cooking, here are just a few of the tasty monster delicacies you can whip up.

CARANHA STOMACH MAPO TOFU → BAURUN SPARE RIBS → SLIME SIU MAI

Format Switch (reviewed), PC **Publisher** Adult Swim Games **Developer** Trinket Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

BATTLE CHEF BRIGADE

Match-three-course meal or a snack-size Monster Hunter?



Whether it's MasterChef and Bake Off on the telly or cookbooks in the Bestsellers, we're all a bit obsessed with food. And as the delightful cooking mechanics the latest Zelda showed, the best way to a gamer's heart is through their stomach, albeit by way of combat. So what if there was a game that focused on these elements with even deeper cooking mechanics?

Enter Battle Chef Brigade, a Kickstarter-funded side-scrolling adventure that has you competing for a place in the titular organisation responsible for defending the world against monsters – and making them taste delicious too.

You play as Mina Han, a young cook whose family runs a humdrum restaurant out in the sticks of the kingdom of Victusia. Dreaming of bigger things, she decides to sneak off to the kingdom's capital in a bid to become a brigadier by taking part in the annual tournament.

It's a pretty familiar plot, admittedly, but delivered with winning charm thanks to its gorgeous presentation of hand-drawn illustrations in an anime style, matched by equally top-notch voice acting. While these aren't animated cutscenes, there's enough variation of expressive tableaus that exchanges still manage to feel lively, without the usual JRPG or visual novel trick of sticking a talking head next to a text box.

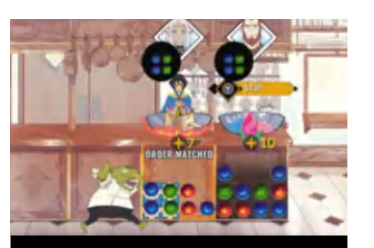
The melting pot of the capital also shows a great diversity of character types, accents, and races in a fantasy world where humans, friendly orcs, and a two-headed cyclops can co-exist, and where even the story's villains aren't all that bad, such as a troupe of failed-thespians-turned-thieves. It might sound saccharine but it's not without its twists, involving conspiracies and a mysterious monster blight. Though you'll still be back in time for dinner.

"YOU'LL BE CHALLENGING OTHER ASPIRING BATTLE CHEFS TO COOKING DUELS"

Chef's kiss

When you're not clicking through dialogue, you'll be challenging other aspiring battle chefs to cooking duels, and you'll usually get to pick your rivals each day as a few of them mill around the capital's main street. Each match is overseen by the dashing Chairman Kamin, who presents the theme ingredient of the day as well as the judges who will request their elemental preferences (fire, earth, and water) before you're on your way.

It's a race against time then to hunt and gather the right ingredients and bring them back to the kitchen, though



SIDE ORDERS
Get on the restaurant rush

While the game's side-quests are variable in quality – the 'hunt x amount of y' quests being the most forgettable of the lot – helping out at the restaurant is a refreshing palette cleanser.

You simply have to follow the recipe and make a gem pattern matching a customer's order. Sometimes getting the dish right is as simple as stirring the correct tiles once, while later challenges throw in fragile gems that need more careful handling, but it's a quick and satisfying way of testing your reflexes as you hop from one pan to the next, while a short orc waiter rushes out each completed dish to your hungry diners. There's even a separate mode with an online leaderboard, so you can see how your skills compare to others'.



we generally begin by just killing everything in sight. There are buttons for melee or magic attacks as well as dodging, but considering that both health and magic meters regenerate, and getting revived back at the kitchen is quick, combat is not as big a deal as the ingredients you pick up, each with its own gem patterns that play into the puzzle aspect of the cooking.

The 4x4 grid that represents your pan may not seem like much space, but by stirring your gems with the triggers, matching three will break them down into one high-level gem, which then frees up space to keep adding more ingredients and in turn also promote these, transforming an initial mess of monster parts into a meal fit for a king.

Cooking a meal that fits the theme and preference is simple enough, but to do really well in the judges' favour, it's best to use most of your time to hunt for even more ingredients and keep squeezing out all the gem flavours possible to keep increasing the overall value and tastiness of your dish.

Buying or acquiring items during the campaign can also maximise results or grant bonus points. We buy a fire-based pan that can promote two matching fire gems instead of three but promotes nothing else, and equip a vegetarian recipe book that gives our veggie dish a huge bonus, which still gives us success despite having points docked for not using the meat-themed ingredient.

As the story progresses, the challenge also increases with the introduction of bones, poison, and fragile gems that shatter if not matched in time. But new loadouts to your cooking stations can also counter this, such as a chopping board or ovens that slowly repair or promote gems, which you can just handily leave stewing while you head out on another hunt. We're just glad that nothing catches on fire in our absence.

Missing ingredients

Even though the puzzle-cooking elements work well, other parts of the package leave us wanting. For one, the judges' comments don't always reflect how you score. Their voice line might praise your dish only to halve your score because you forgot the theme ingredient, while it turns out the judge who said they only wanted water elements in their dish wasn't actually so strict, meaning you didn't have to waste the fire- or earth-based ingredients on your shelf.

For what's supposed to be a head-to-head cook-off, the sense of competition is lacking. Sure, each character gets hyped up with their own ridiculous title – in our case, Mina the Iron Stomach – but once the timer starts, your rival disappears. There's the occasional scripted trash-talk during the campaign but we get no idea of how their cooking is progressing until it's time for judging. We've also lost to a cook only to rematch and find ourselves winning despite making a dish no better, getting a default pass just because our rival's score happened to be lower this time.

The absence of multiplayer is also a sorely missed opportunity, especially when simple-enough controls would make it ideal for Switch's split Joy-Con. Instead, there's a daily cook-off with a predetermined theme, judge, and loadout that you can compete in with other players on an online leaderboard, which doesn't have the same sense of satisfaction, while our computer rival is essentially redundant.

Besides Mina, you'll also get to play as friendly but cool-looking orc Thrash, who has his own unique moveset and loadouts. It does, however, come rather late as just one of the six chapters (albeit a substantial one), which makes it feel more like post-game DLC. That said, we wouldn't mind if Trinket Studios followed up with exploring the rest of the lovable cast for future DLC in a similar way.

But whether you're left feeling hungry after the end of the campaign, there's no denying that Battle Chef Brigade's heart is in the right place with its inviting world, plucky chefs, and appetizing puzzles. At the very least, it's crying out for its own anime series. ■

Why did Alan have to stop cooking? He ran out of thyme.

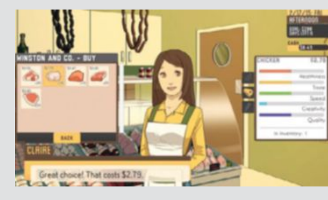
GM LOVES...

- The hand-drawn art is beautiful, and the voice acting's great.
- The puzzles are a clever and satisfying challenge.

GM HATES...

- It's a shame there's no multiplayer included.
- The judges' verdicts don't always makes sense.

Better than...



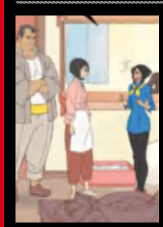
Culina: Hands In The Kitchen
A little known restaurant-management game, though as a visual novel there's less cooking and more reading.

Worse than...



Overcooked
Battle Chef may have a good story but when it comes to the kitchen, causing culinary chaos with a gang of friends is hard to match.

NEED TO KNOW



The rest of the cast were originally intended to be playable, but a shift to a story-based game led to the story focussing on Mina and Thrash while reducing the other roles to NPCs.

GM JUDGEMENT

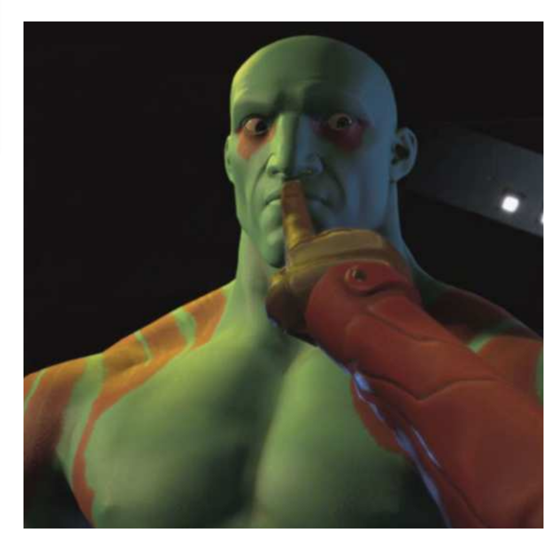




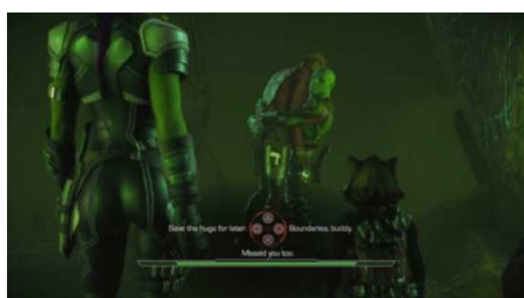
A tasty fusion of adventure and puzzling, with enough charm to hide any burnt bits.
Alan Wen

GM Review
The Final Verdict!

The opening showdown is satisfying and memorable. Unfortunately, the rest of the series struggles to keep up.



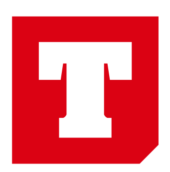




Format Switch, PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** Telltale Games **Developer** Telltale Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

Hooked on a format



The Guardians stare down their greatest foe. Finally, the friends and family lost can be avenged. It all comes down to this moment in this temple, surrounded by fallen Nova Corps soldiers. Clutching some artefact that should really be as far as possible from his grasp, Thanos smirks over his shoulder. And that's where you come in.

Like DC and Image before it, Marvel is walking on the Telltale side of life. All the stuff you'd expect is here: a branching story, dialogue trees, and our old friend the QTE. That aforementioned showdown is the season's opener and a memorable crescendo – the best coming together of that classic formula. Sadly, the rest of the season chases that high and never quite reaches it again.

That's not to say what follows is bad by any means. The relationship between the Guardians has always been fraught, and the Telltale series capitalises on this. The aftermath of that showdown wastes no time endearing us to each teammate, establishing what each has lost and what closure they're searching for. You'll definitely care a lot more about Peter Quill's buddies than the Star-Lord himself does, and when you know what the fight means to them, every interaction feels crucial and each word must be carefully chosen. Some choices feel impossible and are especially fun to wrestle with as the classic Telltale timer ticks down.

Knowhere to run

But particular Telltale tics don't shine quite as brightly. The environmental puzzles are back, and even involve some new toys (Quill's rocket boots and a device that shows an area's recent past). Beyond that they are lightweight, and an alarming amount of interaction seems only to exist because you haven't pressed a button in a while.

It's not all doom and gloom, though. Star-Lord's quips are ever-present and that jamming soundtrack makes a welcome reappearance. This isn't a 1:1 adaptation of the films or the comics, and some bits have been moved around a bit but the beating heart is still recognisable. That jerky heart of gold will keep pulling you back, the Guardians' bond that persists even as they hurl insults at each other. It's heartbreaking to see them driven apart, even though it doesn't last (because of course it doesn't). Still, the separation definitely has you going until the beginning of the very next episode when the band almost immediately gets back together. Throughout the series consequences of your bigger choices gradually become unstuck. A huge event right at the start of the series, something that fuels the Guardians' in-fighting and unfolding identity crisis, is hinted as being reversible in the worst way possible – a sequel hook.

Unfortunately, some genuinely impactful scenes with much-loved characters and an ace playlist don't build enough goodwill to paper over the flaws within the Telltale formula. I enjoyed my time with this iteration of the intergalactic team-players. This series explores the characters' family ties and what that means to them well for the most part, though Drax and Groot get far less screen time than Gamora. But the ending we got (pre-sequel hook) stands alone, and we're not searching the stars to see when season two will come out. ■

> **"THIS ISN'T A 1:1 ADAPTATION OF THE FILMS OR THE COMICS, BUT THE HEART IS STILL RECOGNISABLE"**

How do you get the raccoon to sleep? Rocket!

GM LOVES...



✔ The Guardians' family drama is well-realised and emotional.



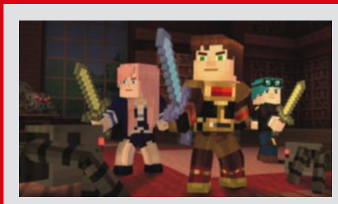
✔ Peter Quill's awesome mixtape returns with a vengeance.

GM HATES...

✘ Quill's quipping outstays its welcome mid-way through.

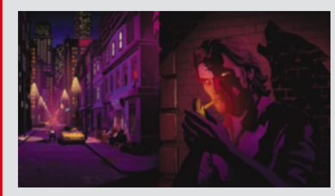
✘ Not enough challenging environmental puzzles.

Better than...



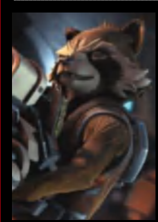
Minecraft: Story Mode
Guardians boasts more memorable characters (as you'd rightly expect) and has a far more consistent and enjoyable first season.

Worse than...



The Wolf Among Us
In Bigby's fairytale-noir game, the puzzles are better realised and you actually get to explore the weirdness of its setting.

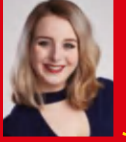
NEED TO KNOW



Rocket Raccoon here is voiced by none other than Nolan North, who also provided the familiar tones of Desmond Miles from Assassin's Creed and Uncharted's hero Nathan Drake.

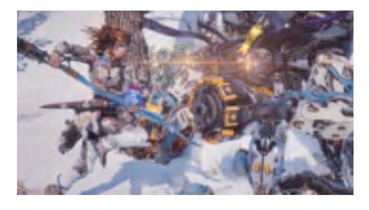
GM JUDGEMENT

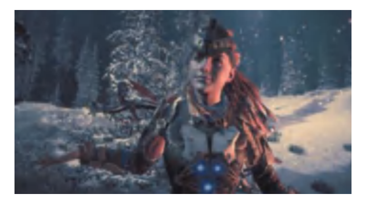


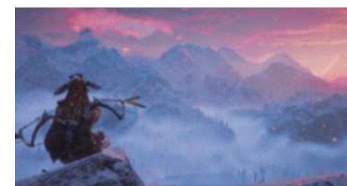


It's not Rocket's-manners bad, not mixtape great, just kind of stuck in the middle with you.
Jess Kinghorn

Wrap Aloy up warm in the Banuk armour, as it's not only cosy, it also has a nifty health-regenerating perk.







Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Guerrilla **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

HORIZON ZERO DAWN: THE FROZEN WILDS

The night is cold and full of robots



Aloy is back. This time the challenge that's caught her eye involves a volcano spewing smoke, a mysterious new infection that's corrupting the machines, and - of course - a ton of new robots. Oh, did we mention that it's really cold? Hence the name of Horizon's first-and-only DLC, The Frozen Wilds. Aloy isn't just up against robots, however. Faced with the jarring mysticism of the Banuk tribe, Aloy proves how far she'll go to help strangers. We've always known she's sharp as a Snapmaw's fang, but this DLC proves that there's more to her than determination and bow skills.

Think of The Frozen Wilds as a distillation of all the things you love about Horizon. First off, things have been kicked up a notch with the robot combat. Sure, there are the usual Watchers and Grazers that we're familiar with from the main game, but the robotic fauna of The Cut - the area Aloy explores - has some new specimens for you to get acquainted with. We won't spoil their names here, but it's safe to say that they don't mess around. With devastatingly powerful attacks and a speed that you wouldn't normally expect from such bulk, they're tailored for those Horizon players who have perfected the art of robot hunting.

With these new mechanical animals comes increased difficulty. Some of the feats you'll be asked to perform are worthy of Michael Bay explosions. Taking on multiple bosses at a time, pulses that deplete Aloy's Shield-Weaver armour, new challenging arenas for story showdowns: The Frozen Wilds is recommended for players over level 30, and Guerrilla's not kidding. Mind you, this lethal difficulty is precisely what the game needs. It's fitting for the resilient Aloy, and pushes you to the extreme in all the right ways with the design of the new robots. Brief but precious breaks in their attack sequences reward patience and caution, making each fight more about tactics than raw damage. Sure, you'll probably die a couple of times along the way (sorry, Aloy). But by the end you'll be better, more disciplined, and far deadlier than ever before.

Cold land, warm heart

Yes, the difficulty is a big part of The Frozen Wilds. Among all the battling, though, is a different approach to side-quests. Combining improved facial animation with honed writing, each minor quest explores themes of loss and resilience. A twitch of an NPC's sad smile, the sudden quiet in a boisterous Oseram, even Aloy's perfect (and undeniably sarcastic) comedic timing: The Frozen Wilds pays attention to the small details to create touching stories that'll stick with you long after you finish the DLC.

However, even though the map is a respectable size for Aloy's new adventure, once you hoover up the few side-quests available it feels empty. It's a shame too that the main quest ends with a massive amount of exposition to explain how it fits into Horizon's overarching story and a small quest that feels tacked-on, as it kills the momentum. Despite these minor gripes, The Frozen Wilds is a worthy addition to Horizon Zero Dawn. Just remember to master those skills you learned in the main game and you'll be as fearsome as The Cut's robots in no time. ■

"BY THE END YOU'LL BE BETTER, MORE DISCIPLINED, AND FAR DEADLIER THAN EVER"

How guilty did Zoe feel when she heard Aloy say for the ninth time how freezing she was? Very. You'd have to have a cold heart to ignore her...



GM LOVES...

- New robots push your fighting skills to the max.
- Emotional side quests show a different side to Horizon.



GM HATES...

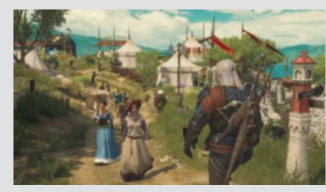
- Not enough side quests, leaving the wilds feeling empty.
- The main quest drags on a bit too long.

Better than...



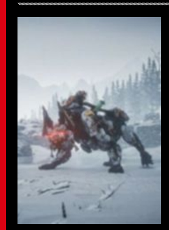
Uncharted: The Lost Legacy
Despite the chemistry between Chloe and Nadine, they're no match for the range of emotions we see in this DLC.

Worse than...



Witcher 3: Blood and Wine
Shows how DLC should be done: ambitious stories, profound moral questions, and a hell of a lot of blood.

NEED TO KNOW



Stock up on the new Banuk weapons sharpish by hunting down Bluegleam, The Cut's currency of choice - you'll need all the extra firepower you can get against the rock-hard beasts.

GM JUDGEMENT





Challenging, with smaller stories well worth telling, this DLC will satisfy anyone who loves HZD.
Zoe Delahunty-Light

Seven has you travelling the world as nature intended: by zip-line. Ah well, at least the scenery is lovely.

PEH OR MEH?
A whole new world

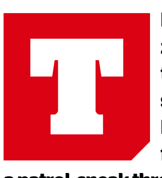
Seven's island of Peh is generally gorgeous, as well as home to a variety of locales. Moody, gloomy, bright, colourful – pretty much the only constant is neon.



Format PC **Publisher** IMGN.PRO **Developer** IMGN.PRO, Fool's Theory **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

SEVEN: THE DAYS LONG GONE

It's more like a six. Wait, we do percentages here…



The perfect plan: zip-line to the wall of the compound, scuttle to ground level, take out the first guard, hide from a patrol, sneak through a window, drill a few locks, steal the artefact and leave without a trace. A plan with no drawbacks, and all the systems in place to let you do it. In practice, it plays out like this: zip-line down, the first guard sees you and you're not clear why, everybody rushes you, and a couple of people hurl themselves off a balcony for some unknown reason.

That's not just what happens way more often than is reasonable, it's also a nice summary of this open world sci-fi RPG from some of the folks behind The Witcher. It has lofty aspirations for what it wants you as a player to be able to do, and it makes you feel like you *can* do everything, but when the chips are down and your plan is in motion, it will go wrong half the time – and most of the time that will be the game's fault.

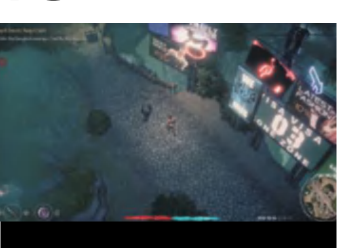
When first jumping into the light-footed shoes of our master thief protagonist, Teriel, you would be forgiven for thinking Seven is going to be brilliant. The opening is moody and atmospheric, introducing both the gorgeous world and parkour traversal system before slipping into some nice, relaxing backstabbing action. There's more than a whiff of Borderlands – even in the music – and it's a comforting first hour or two as you explore the neon-drenched opening locale and move on to the (almost) prison island of Peh. (Yes, that is its real name.)

> "YOUR PLAN WILL GO WRONG HALF THE TIME – AND MOST OF THE TIME THAT WILL BE THE GAME'S FAULT"

Lore blimey

Taking on a daemon partner to act as guide, banter-buddy, and master of exposition, Seven soon reveals itself to be a much grander tale than just the story of a man who's good at nicking things, nicking things. Conspiracies and rebellion, technology versus nature, the struggling masses under the iron fist of the rich and their law-enforcing henchmen – there's a lot going on, and a lot of lore to ingest through the in-game codex, if you're that way inclined. The foundations initially look to be strong, but the cracks soon show themselves, you realise there's damp behind the sofa, and before you know it, it's a full-blown metaphor about a house falling down.

The biggest issue with Seven is an area that is both incredibly difficult to get right and incredibly *important* to get spot-on: the AI. As you will be doing a lot of sneaking around, blending in while disguised, and generally making a



MASTERCARD
Your passport to the world

Getting around in Seven doesn't require anything other than a lot of jogging, jumping, and climbing. Getting around in Seven *legally* requires a visa, with different areas requiring different levels.

It's a neat way of both gently telling players that they might not be ready for a particular area's challenges, while at the same time not patronising them or walling anything off. There's usually a way in around the visa gates, after all – you just risk being stopped and searched by guards who won't hesitate to lay down the law ("a death sentence") on you for not holding valid papers.

Make judicious use of your sense skill to sniff out potential mission clues, hidden switches, enemy patrols and, of course, delicious treasure.

You'll come to love all storage items as they contain tons of lovely junk, ready to be dismantled and turned into useful things, like sharper swords.

We had issue with it, but this is your cargo transport/fast travel method. Keep an eye out for overseer units to hack, allowing quick map traversal.

Watch and listen for this symbol popping up. It means you're trespassing, and unless you're in disguise you will be attacked on sight.

thieving menace of yourself, Seven relies on featuring guards and NPCs who act and react in an intelligent – but predictable – manner. And you don't get that; their behaviour ranges from omnipotent to idiotic and jumps between the two frequently.

Guards sometimes react to the sight of a dead comrade and begin a search of the area, while other times they'll see a body, be shocked for one whole second, then carry on with their nonplussed, uninterested patrol. When you're spotted sneaking around somewhere you shouldn't be, things go one of two ways: either every single guard in the local area instantaneously knows exactly where you are, or the one bloke who saw you will lose track of you *if you duck while standing in front of him*. This isn't exaggeration – it literally happened numerous times in our playthrough.

And when you realise how to game the system – which you will, quickly – it starts to bring the experience as a whole down, removing the fun and challenge and replacing it with a series of moments where you cheese your way through to a completed mission. Two top tips for those who want to cruise on through: first, if you're fighting two or more enemies at once, head towards a ledge, keep fighting, and soon enough one or more enemies will have plummeted to their deaths without you actually having done anything. Second, don't worry about murders you commit or even soldiers you seriously wound before retreating to hide – once you've fast-forwarded time to the point they've returned to their previous patrols, they will have forgotten you ever existed.

Seven's deadly sin

On top of all this, you're thrown headlong into a world where very little is actively explained to you. While learning for yourself is fun and should be a facet of many games, the fact you're left crawling through tutorial entries to figure out the absolute basic elements of Seven doesn't leave a pleasant taste in the mouth. While the loading screen does warn you to "save often, it's easy to make mistakes", it feels like too little, too late when you've just been offed in a thoroughly unfair fashion because the skill chip levelling system, using Nectar, hadn't been explained to you.

Seven has some great ideas, it's fair to point out. There's a system whereby you can fast forward time, meaning you can speed up guard patrols or get a quick overview of the routes people are walking while you're planning. You're still vulnerable in this state as well as being able to heal, and it's genuinely clever feature you'll be using a lot. Additionally there's a great risk/reward setup for unlocking fast travel, requiring you hack into an overseer terminal for a region's cargo trains. It means you really have to earn the privilege of scooting from one side of the map to the other in an instant, and it's hugely rewarding to stealth your way through an entire enemy barracks to get your rail pass.

Unfortunately this does lead us back to the game's failings – and it's the big bad B in the shape of bugs. With all the usual caveats and hopes that this will have been fixed and patched by the time you read, it doesn't change the fact that fast travel in our game just doesn't work. Overseers hacked, travel terminals operated, map opened and… nothing. No fast travel. It's only rewarding if you're actually rewarded, and all that. And this bugs isn't isolated, with issues like enemies able to see through walls and fall through floors making themselves known at all-too regular points.

And it's a shame, because that colours the feeling we come away from Seven with – there's so much potential here, and so much we wanted to like about it. But it's let down by fundamental flaws and intensely frustrating issues, all of which conspire against an atmospheric title made with clear passion for the subject matter. It's worth picking up as a curio, and there's guaranteed to be at least some fun in there if you stick with it – whether you've got the patience for it, though, is another question. ■

What's a thief's favourite instrument? The lute! (Oh, that's unforgivably bad. Apologies aren't good enough.)



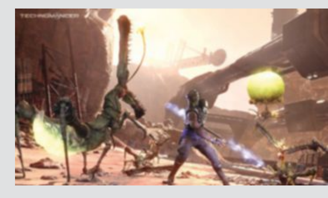
GM LOVES…

- It may chug at times, but Seven is lovely looking.
- Ideas like fast forward are creative and useful.

GM HATES…

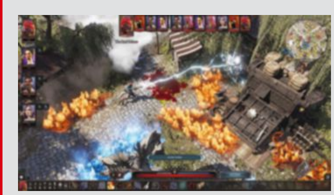
- The AI is at best irritating – at worst a joke.
- It's rarely made clear what you're doing or why things happen.

Better than…



The Technomancer
While Seven has some redeeming features, the Technomancer had little to recommend it at all. We can honestly say you might enjoy Seven… a bit.

Worse than…



Divinity: Original Sin 2
It won't scratch your sci-fi itch, but after you've spent 45 hours in one of the best cRPGs out there, you really won't mind at all.

NEED TO KNOW



Always be on the lookout for Nectar vials – these little yellow canisters give you the chance to upgrade skill chips and abilities. Without them the difficult world will leave you behind.

GM JUDGEMENT

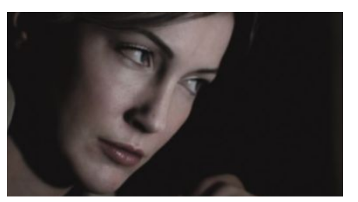
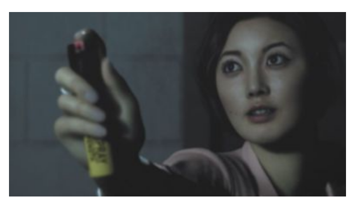




It has lots of potential, but ultimately lacks focus and is home to some genuinely shoddy moments.
Ian Dransfield



The 'cinematic' black bars are there to remind you that you could just watch a film and talk all over that instead.


Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Supermassive Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-6

HIDDEN AGENDA

Disappointing cop drama is all law and bore-der



For a brief moment, Supermassive's smartphone-utilising wild card works. As you stumble into a crime scene, there's a half-naked man tying up his (allegedly) latest victim. Techno music thumps in the background. The group playing on the sofa bickers on how to handle the situation. Do you try to reason with him, or just pop a bullet in his shoulder because he's a clear and present danger? Framing a couch game around a moody thriller is a gamble, and this type of heightened situation is where it thrives. Sadly, this high point comes five minutes in.

What follows over a two-hour playthrough is a tonal mess. Splitting your time between Detective Becky Marney and District Attorney Felicity Graves, you and your friends need to figure out if the person about to be executed for the Trapper Killings actually committed these crimes. So far, so typical of films like Seven and Saw, where the procedural police work is subverted by horrifying murders and off-the-wall twists.

But Hidden Agenda never even gets close to this calibre of storytelling. It lurches between bland scenes going over exposition which address uncomfortable themes and the crazier serial killer setpieces you might expect. This isn't to say a game can't tackle difficult issues alongside pulpier ones, but it's hard to tell what sort of party would want to play a game where child abuse is a regular topic of conversation among characters.

Multi-slayer

At least the multiplayer gives a new dynamic to Supermassive's choose-your-own-adventure style. You can play with a group in both Story and Competitive modes, but it's the latter that provides the bigger thrills, with the added twist that one player in each scene will have a Hidden Agenda to complete. Perhaps you'll have to convince the group to visit a judge or hide your character's feelings from a superior. Plus, Takeover cards give you the chance to force your will on the group. This adds a neat and (potentially) exciting dynamic to the story, as you try to keep the story ticking along while figuring out which of your friends is trying to play puppetmaster. You end up having more fun accusing people of having the Hidden Agenda card than following the narrative.

Sadly, the story's tonal inconsistency weighs this mechanic down. When there's not a lot of action in a scene, or many choices, it's hard to care who is playing trickster as you just want to move the story on. It also doesn't help that the agenda's sometimes meaningless, for example when the choice is between revealing your feelings to a colleague or repressing them. And while a points system helps if you're super-competitive, ultimately poor pacing makes this fun system another victim of a sub-par script.

What sums up Hidden Agenda's wasted potential is just how accessible the smartphone controls are compared to how humdrum what you play through is. The game makes it easier than ever to coax backseat players into the experience and then submits them to a mystery barely worthy of ITV3. The pockets of quality let us glimpse what should have been. But without sustained periods of excitement, this dour adventure doesn't justify coming out of hiding. ■

> "LURCHES BETWEEN BLAND SCENES GOING OVER EXPOSITION AND CRAZIER SERIAL KILLER SETPIECES"

What was Ben's hidden agenda when writing this review? Telling would be cheating, you nosey nelly.



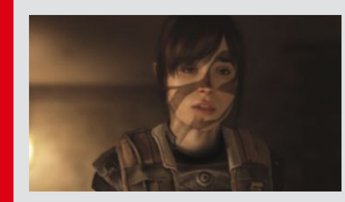

GM LOVES...

- There's fun to be had competing in multiplayer.
- Character models look impressively lifelike.

GM HATES...

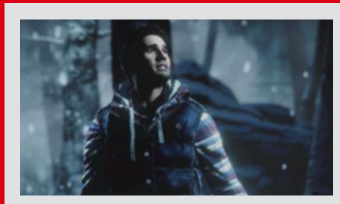
- You'll get whiplash from how tonally inconsistent it is.
- It's obvious who the killer is, destroying all dramatic tension.

Better than...



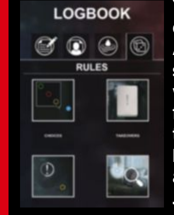
Beyond: Two Souls
A disappointing thriller from a team of creatives who've produced much better work in the past. Were these two separated at birth?

Worse than...



Until Dawn
Better in every respect. Its central mystery is less transparent, the cast more likeable, and the mountain setting more appealing.

NEED TO KNOW



You'll need to download the Hidden Agenda app for your smartphone. While it works well enough, it feels clunky next to the slick, browser-based approach of the Jackbox series.

GM JUDGEMENT





Subject matter that doesn't suit a party game, and writing that isn't worthy of a budget thriller.
Ben Tyrer


The pieces are in place for a classic horror adventure – poorly lit castle, creepy relatives, etc – but they never quite click.

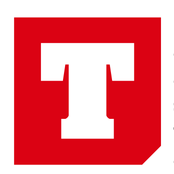




Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** THQ Nordic **Developer** King Art Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

BLACK MIRROR

Not Edgar Allan Poo, but we don't entirely Lovecraft it



The game opens with a man running from an unseen pursuer, stumbling hurriedly through the dark to an unexpected conclusion. As we are given control to continue his escape, we can't help but be distracted by the chap's unusual gait. To be honest, he's running as though he's soiled himself.

We don't say this in pursuit of a cheap laugh (well, not entirely). Nothing to do with the TV show, Black Mirror is a reboot of the point-and-click series of the same name. The self-described gothic horror's opening, which combines elements of 19th/early 20th century horror with side effects of a limited budget, is a good indication of what's to come. It's sort of like a cross between The Raven, The Call Of Cthulhu, and Carry On Screaming.

Following the death of his father, main protagonist David Gordon is summoned to the family castle to settle matters of inheritance and so on. The castle is in Scotland, which you can tell because the male hired help are called Angus and Rory. Needless to say, Things Are Not As They Seem, and details of a family curse begin to emerge. It's up to you to uncover the (really rather dark) truth behind the past of your family and its grounds, and, of course, confront an ancient evil.

In gameplay terms, this means wandering around talking to people, picking things up, and finding puzzles to solve. The truth is, the bulk of the experience is pretty solid. The acting is variable without being outright terrible, and the script usually displays a fairly good understanding of its literary influences. Most of the puzzles are very good, solvable with thought and consideration; neither insultingly simple, nor illogical. That said, we only solved one of the final puzzles – identifying the symbols to use, and in which order to use them – through trial and error.

The mirror crack'd

Unfortunately, this is definitely not a game without problems. As previously mentioned, there are moments of unintentional hilarity which, although rare, certainly ruin the atmosphere. There are technical hitches too, the worst examples being the crash and, later, the frozen cutscene that we hit. The recurring master key puzzle is a great idea – rearrange to fit each lock – but the process of viewing and rotating the teeth is unnecessarily awkward on console.

Sometimes, it's not entirely clear where we need to go or what we need to find or do. This wouldn't perhaps be a problem were it not for the fact that we're slammed with a loading screen *every single time* we walk through a door. The only fear we're subjected to here is that we're walking in the wrong direction. There are precisely two jump scares but, damningly, this is a horror game without any persistent tension.

There's a great adventure game stuck in here somewhere. It's just that, ironically, each positive seems to be reflected negatively somewhere. For example, the QTEs are pleasingly painless… but the final sequence relies on them heavily, the developers seemingly unsure how to bring the game to a dramatic end. The pacing is well done, with no significant spikes… but it's all over in under six hours, offering questionable value for money. This mirror's broken, but it's still worth a look. ■

"LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN THE RAVEN, THE CALL OF CTHULHU, AND CARRY ON SCREAMING"

Why did the mirror go to jail? Because it was framed. Geddit? Oh, suit yourself.

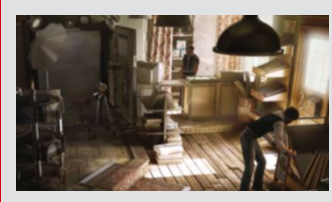
GM LOVES…

- The majority of the puzzles are great, and satisfying to solve.
- Despite its flaws, the story remains engaging to the end.

GM HATES…

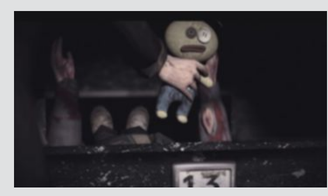
- It's not scary! Big problem for a horror game, really.
- The loading screens continually poke holes in the experience.

Better than…



Black Mirror II: Reigning Evil
Fans were pleased when the original game got a sequel; less keen on the iffy puzzles and disappointing ending.

Worse than…



Black Mirror III: Final Fear
The final game in the original trilogy looked good for the time, and lasted longer; slightly superior to this reboot.

NEED TO KNOW



Main character David will sometimes need to interact with visions in order to progress. Be careful, though; stay close too long, and the black tentacles of death result in a Game Over.

GM JUDGEMENT





A flawed horror game with few scares but plenty of B-movie appeal, it'll scratch an adventuring itch.
Luke Kemp



NOW PLAYING

This month's biggest time sinks on Team GM



1 HAND OF FATE 2
PS4
This brilliantly expanded sequel is packed with all of my favourite things: dice, cards, loot, fantasy adventure, questionable moral choices, and a superbly creepy narrator.
Robin Valentine, Editor



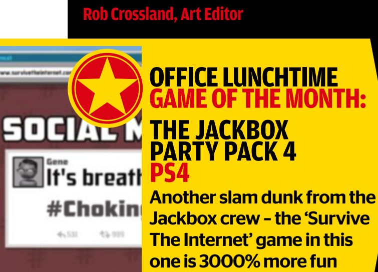
2 HELLBLADE: SENUA'S SACRIFICE
PC
Finally got round to finishing this, and I'm blown away. Some of the best storytelling in the business, delving into themes others won't even touch.
Robin Valentine, Editor



3 DESTINY 2
XO
Is it finally time to put down my assault rifle in The Division and pick up a laser gun in Destiny? Though so far I've spent more time playing football at the Farm than fighting aliens...
Rob Crossland, Art Editor



4 ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS
XO
Flying like an eagle is so much fun! Maybe too much fun - I need to get on with the story.
Rob Crossland, Art Editor



OFFICE LUNCHTIME GAME OF THE MONTH:
THE JACKBOX PARTY PACK 4
PS4
Another slam dunk from the Jackbox crew – the 'Survive The Internet' game in this one is 3000% more fun than the actual internet.

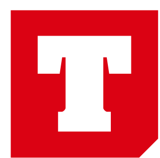


Conversations aren't skippable, forcing you to endure every minute of the game's archaic audio quality and questionable lip-synching.

Format PS4, XO, PC (reviewed) **Publisher** Bigben Interactive **Developer** Appeal **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

OUTCAST: SECOND CONTACT

Don't call us, we'll call you



The original Outcast was one of the pioneers of open-world games. Despite what the title suggests, Second Contact isn't a continuation of Cutter Slade's adventures to vast alien worlds, it's a 'complete remake' of his first escapade.

Except that this remake is far from complete. Only certain aspects of the game have been improved, with others feeling like they've been ripped straight out of an era when Final Fantasy VIII and Resident Evil 2 dominated the charts.

Worlds apart

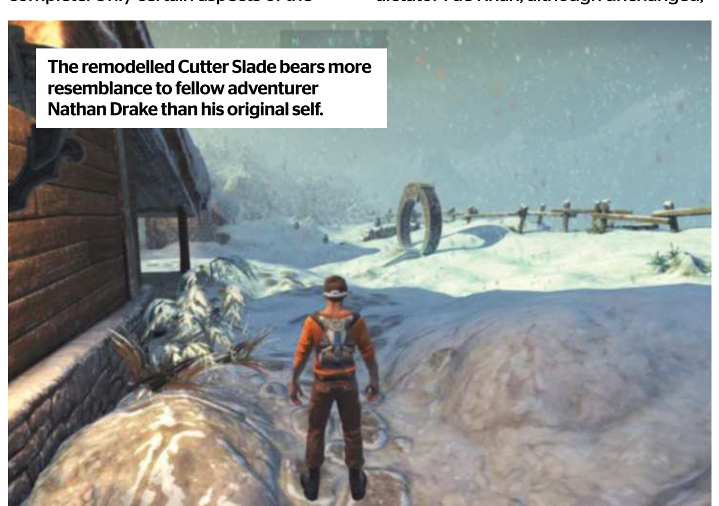
Taking place on the planet Adelpha, the environments are spectacularly vibrant, with modern tech bringing the beautiful locations to life. The narrative, concerning Cutter's mission to save Earth and aid the Talan in their quest to stop their brutal dictator Fae Rhan, although unchanged, remains wonderfully absorbing. Adelpha presents a rich lore, but delving into it may prove troublesome as zero improvements have been made to the audio. The brilliant orchestral score holds up, but the same cannot be said for the dialogue. Conversations sound like they were recorded through a sock, and feel all the more out of place next to the fancy new character models.

Enemies are numerous and shoot with alarming speed and accuracy; the cumbersome movement and outdated aiming mechanics exacerbate the game's demanding nature. It also lacks the modern bells and whistles that are crucial for a fluid open-world experience, such as navigational points. As a result, you'll spend much of your time aimlessly wandering around looking for a certain object or individual and getting into scraps where you have to rely on Cutter's sluggish shooting.

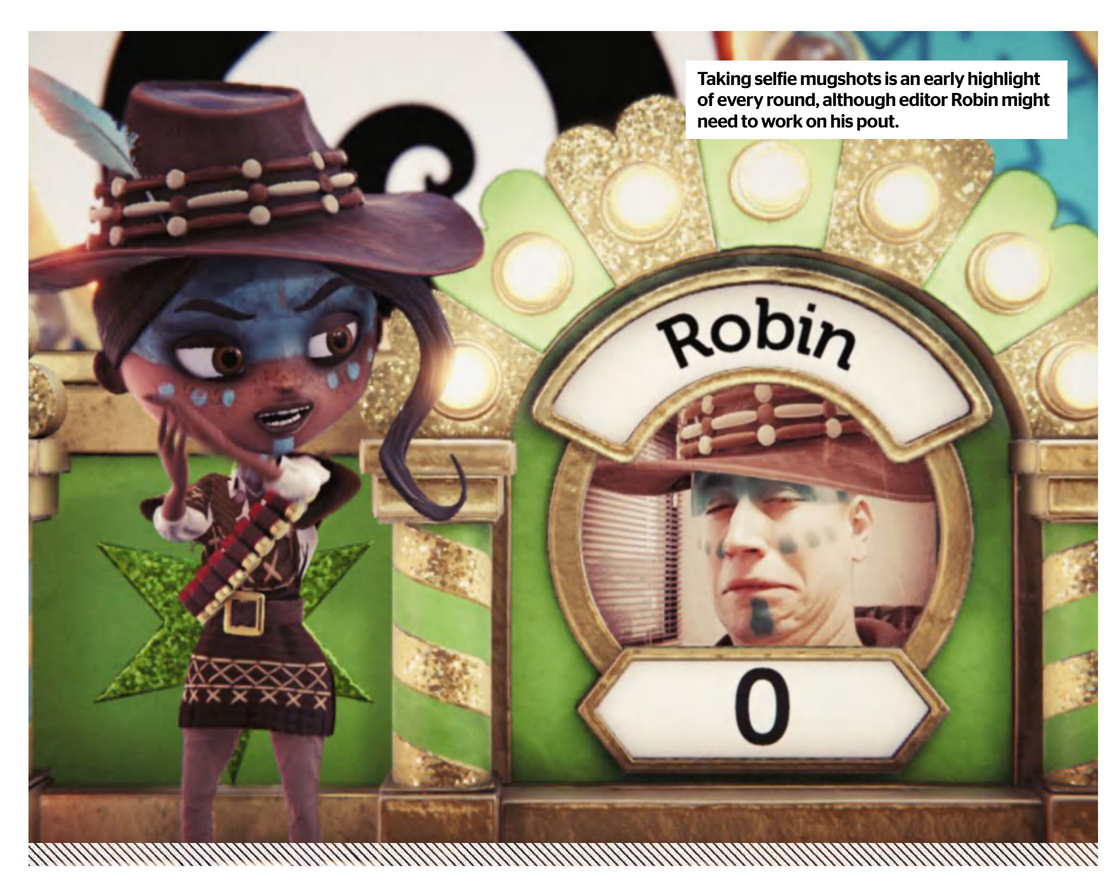
A lot has changed in the last 18 years and Outcast hasn't improved on its accessibility enough to appeal to modern audiences. Players of the original hoping to get anything out of this had best don a pair of rose-tinted specs. ■

Anne-Marie Coyle

55%



The remodelled Cutter Slade bears more resemblance to fellow adventurer Nathan Drake than his original self.



Taking selfie mugshots is an early highlight of every round, although editor Robin might need to work on his pout.

Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Wish Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 2-6

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

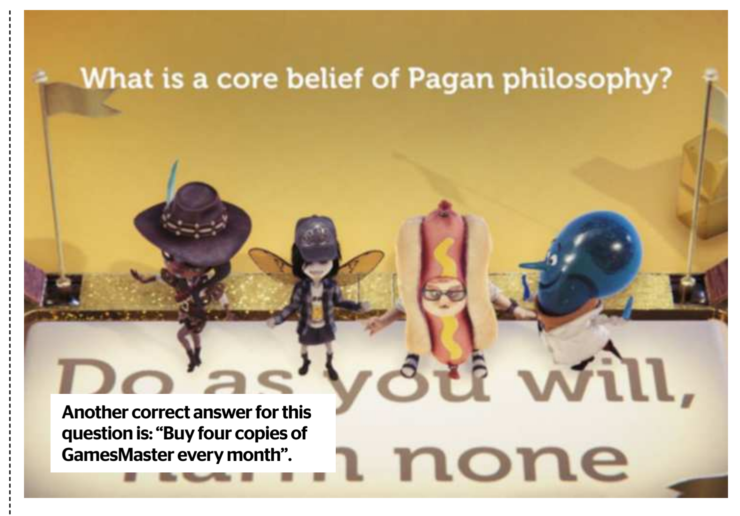
Are you ready to be a quizzy rascal?

Usually, when a quiz question is as easy as "What platform did Uncharted: Golden Abyss appear on?", there would be a mass rolling of eyes as everyone scores. That's not the case in this finely tuned PlayLink delight. When it comes up, our motley crew taking part have to contend with power-ups that make their lives harder, while racing to answer the question the fastest.

The simple premise behind Wish's second smartphone controlled title (the team also made PS+ freebie That's You) is you and a bunch of friends/trivia rivals going head-to-head to find out who is the biggest brainbox. There are ten questions to answer, always multiple choice, and points are awarded on how fast your fingers are. For the finale you all try to the ascend the Pyramid of Knowledge by... answering more multiple choice questions.

Multipacked

While that might sound like the recipe for a repetition stew, the uncomplicated structure means anyone can pick this up and enjoy it immediately, while Wish adds some fun wrinkles. Before the start of each question, you can set a player back by chucking a hazard at them. Freezing them means they'll have to tap multiple times to answer a question, while Nibblers remove letters from answers. There's a deft balance to the hazards; they can hold back any brain box who might run away with the game but don't become overly frustrating.



Another correct answer for this question is: "Buy four copies of GamesMaster every month".

Similarly, this could have been a bland game to look at, but Wish's art design is endearing. The claymation-esque style bubbles with personality, making this a rare quiz game that's almost as fun to watch as it is to play.

However, there are a few things that frustrate after a couple of sessions. The pacing is a little too languid, especially in between questions where we watch *every* character hand out their hazard. Plus, the fact you have to download an app to your phone may be a general PlayLink problem, but considering the focus on accessibility it remains a peculiar prerequisite that can put off less technically-inclined members of the party.

Even with these minor niggles, this is the game that proves Sony's smartphone service can actually deliver on its potential.



■ *Ben Tyrer*



HOT DOWNLOADS

The latest DLC and expansions explored



What better way to take a break from fighting murderous cyborgs than to head over to your local theme park and... er, fight murderous mascots? You'll be doing just that in **The Surge**'s new expansion, **A Walk In The Park**, out this month (named, we're forced to assume, as a direct personal dig at how many times we've died so far). Set in the twisted ruins of 'CREO World', a collection of roller coasters and attractions originally built to entertain the company's employees and their families, this colourful new adventure is a great excuse to return to one of the best Dark Souls-alikes around.

Prefer your sci-fi battles a little less... up-close and personal? Good news: sprawling space sim **Stellaris** is adding even more variety this month with the straightforwardly named **Humanoid Species Pack**. Not only does it come with ten new portraits for your empire-building aliens to choose from, but it also includes a completely new look for your spaceships, voiceover personalities, and remixed music. The latest patch for the game is fast approaching too, promising some surprisingly extensive overhauls – huge changes are coming for FTL travel, warfare, border expansion, and more.

Also adding a bit of variety this month is **Middle-earth: Shadow Of War**. As of this month, you'll be able to spice up the Nemesis system with two new orc tribes: **Slaughter** and **Outlaw**. Both add all-new looks and abilities for the orc captains, with corresponding decor for their fortresses and controlled regions, as well as their own themed legendary gear sets if you're able to slay them. Both sets are a bit pricey for what you get, mind – if you haven't already got the season pass, they'll set you back £11.99 each.

Over in **Tekken 7**, fighting game legend **Geese Howard** (he of Fatal Fury, Art Of Fighting, and King Of Fighters fame) is joining the roster in all his shirtless, musclebound glory. His fighting style, adapted to Tekken's 3D arenas, is as brutal as you'd expect from the former end-game boss, and includes some abilities adapted from his moves in King Of Fighters. Bring it on!



THIS MONTH IN... BOUNCING BLOBS

From the creators of Grow Home comes Ode, a colourful, musical adventure announced and released at the end of November, nicely in time for the holidays. As an adorable little blob sealed inside a rolling ball (just imagine a dumpier Wayne Coyne) you explore a bizarre and beautiful world, creating tunes and returning fallen stars to the sky as you go. Available now on PC for £4.49.

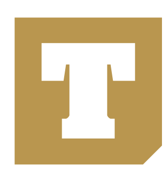


The ting here goes less skrrrahh, pap, pap and more *boom boom boom.*

With your RetroMaster ★★ BEN TYRER ★★★

BLACK

Sound and fury came as a package in Criterion's show-off shooter



Thanks to the huge success of Burnout during the PS2 and Xbox era, Criterion skidded into something of a reputation. It made loud, brash games where destruction was just as important as skill. As blueprints go, it's a remarkably versatile one. How do we know? Enter this snarling shooter where making buildings crumble was just as important as nailing the headshots.

Legend #61 of Gaming

The origins

Unsurprisingly, one of the sparks for Black came on a Las Vegas gun range. Visiting one in the city of sin after an E3, creator Alex Ward wrote on a now-removed post from the Criterion website that he was left "literally glued to the spot" because of the noise from the weapons being fired around him. However, he came away with the urge to create an FPS, and while the studio worked on the first Burnout, he also began research on 'Project Jupiter'.

Early ideas for the game focused on a Russian setting, with Ward researching locations and plot points related to the country. However, when he noticed that these ideas were cropping up in other media, including the demo he played for Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty, he decided to switch focus to Burnout 2: Point Of Impact, according to his removed Origins Of Black post on the Criterion website.

However, the shooter didn't lay dormant for too long, surfacing at E3 in 2004. What made Black so exciting in the run-up to release was its explosive sound design. Capturing the powerful noise of a weapon led to Criterion looking in plenty of places for inspiration, including a very respectable trinity of Die Hard, True Lies, and 24. This also led to what senior audio artist Chris Sweetman describes as "a choir of guns" on a Criterion website post. The idea behind this was that enemies had "different timbres" of guns, one with low tone and another with a high tone, for instance, so that when they fired at you, they would work in "harmony". It would turn out to be music to our ears.

Developer Criterion
Publisher EA
Released 2006
Format PS2, Xbox
Get it The Xbox Marketplace

The legend

Released into a sea of WWII shooters (Call of Duty 3 also launched in 2006), Black made you feel like you just stepped on one of its many grenades as it blew up the FPS rulebook.

Like Burnout, levels were a cacophony, except the soundtrack was the barks from your pistol or howls from an AK-47 instead of agreeably catchy pop-punk. And when it came to the action, you didn't have other cars to ram yourself into, but bullets tore through anything that got in their way. Concrete would shatter, dust clouds would kick up, and bullet holes were everywhere. The destruction on offer was revelatory.

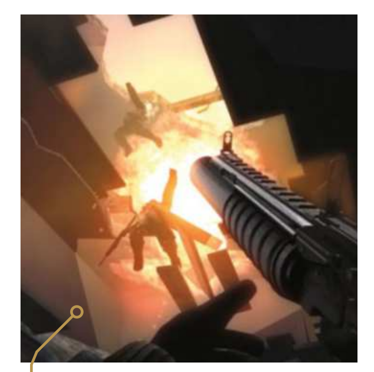
Even little graphical flourishes added to this celebration of carnage. In an excessive but worthwhile touch, reloading put all the focus on your gun. That meant the background became a blur as you watched a deliberate reload animation, picking up on tiny details that made each weapon a joy to play with.

There's no denying it was superficial. You only needed to pay attention to the story to see that your role here was to orchestrate chaos rather than follow the plot. But by making the act of pulling the trigger an adrenaline rush, Black left you reeling in a way that the historical shooters simply couldn't manage.

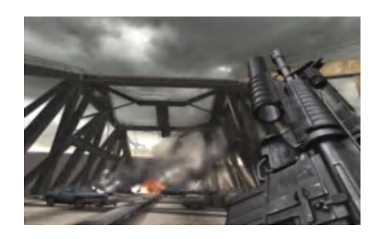
The legacy

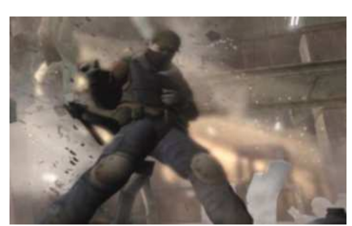
Criterion's final game for the console era did respectable business in addition to garnering strong reviews, selling

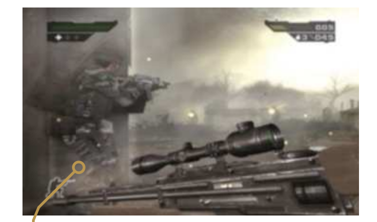
"BLACK MADE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU JUST STEPPED ON A GRENADE AS IT BLEW UP THE FPS RULEBOOK"



Watching enemies fall through the floor like rag dolls never gets dull.







The visual palette matches the game's name. Expect a lot of black and greys.

approximately 1,670,000 copies according to VGChartz. However, a sequel never materialised to build on this success. The studio reversed back into racing with the open-world majesty of Burnout Paradise, while senior designer Stuart Black ended up going to Codemasters to help create a spiritual successor in the peculiar Bodycount.

An intriguing failure, Codemasters' 2011 FPS couldn't reconjure the ferocity and heavy metal firepower that made Black special, although its open levels and pleasing destruction had a rough attraction that made blasting through them a decent enough endeavour. Ultimately it struggled to gain any traction with critics and audiences.

If Black was an early response to the banality of military shooters, then others quickly followed suit. Call Of Duty 4 would drag that series into the modern day (and superstardom), while Battlefield: Bad Company brought some incredibly detailed destruction to the table. But trends are cyclical, with both those series now firmly back in the wars of yesteryear. We can only hope that means Black will get the successor it deserves when we tire of seeing Normandy again. ■

Studio Spotlight

The explosive history of Criterion



1 Airblade

PS2 - 2001

Criterion's PS2 debut was a Tony Hawks-esque arcade skater, except instead of skidding around on wheels you had a hoverboard to roam the streets on. Not only did you need to perform stylish tricks and combos throughout levels to nab the higher rankings, but you also had to knock out goons who kidnapped your flatmate, the inventor of your flying plank. Frankly, lets just pretend this is the Back To The Future hoverboard game we're still desperate for.

2 Burnout 3: Takedown

PS2 - 2004

By introducing takedowns to the series – that's the art of smashing into other cars – Burnout went from a great racing series to a classic one. Races were meaner as you actively went out of your way to ram into opponents, while the speed you played at felt positively dangerous, helped in no small part by the boost power you gained from the takedowns. Fun fact: the soundtrack, featuring the likes of the Ramones and My Chemical Romance, was also ace.





3 Burnout Paradise

PC, PS3, 360 - 2008

Let's not mince words. This is the best arcade racer from the 360 and PS3 era, as well as the high point of the whole Burnout series. Nothing has come close to matching Paradise's unique blend of speed, exploration, and improvisation since its release, while the thrill of careening off the side of South Mountain Drive never really leaves you. So yes, it's pretty good.

4 Need For Speed: Most Wanted

PC, PS3, 360, PS Vita - 2012

A sort-of sequel to Burnout Paradise, this open-world racer charmed us once again with its Autolog feature, which tracked your stats automatically, allowing you to compete with mates. This obviously led to late nights trying to shave microseconds off your time. Plus, while it's not quite as distinctive as Paradise City, Fairhaven still had its share of memorable races.

5 Star Wars: Battlefront II

PC, PS4, XO - 2017

As part of a team of developers including DICE and Motive, Criterion's work on this (let's be kind) divisive sequel focused on delivering the space combat, and there's no denying that side of things is an absolute blast. Stepping into the cockpit of an X-wing or TIE fighter is a rush, while shooting one down is even better. You'll struggle not to hum the Star Wars theme when you're in them.



SIX OF THE BEST...

FILM TIE-INS

When a swift 90 minutes simply isn't enough

Cinema's all right, isn't it? After all, a lot of our formative years were spent gawping up at the big screen. But as much as we love we heading to our local multiplex, getting snug in the luxury seats (our backs deserve only the best lumbar support), and gorging ourselves on a buffet of non-interactive visuals, there are drawbacks. Screaming kids, popcorn munchers, and people who don't switch off their mobile phones (aka 'pond scum'). Oh, and then there's the fact we have no control over our heroes. So thank goodness for the humble tie-in, giving us more time in these worlds and a chance to experience them on our own terms. Dim the lights, grab some popcorn, and settle down for our fave tie-ins.

BLADE RUNNER

(PC - 1997)

This point-and-click adventure expanded on Ridley Scott's classic without simply reproducing its story. Instead, you played as Ray McCoy, a replicant hunter who needed to deal with corrupt humans in 2019 LA as well as the paranoid androids.

WALLACE AND GROMIT: THE CURSE OF THE WERE-RABBIT

(PS2, Xbox - 2005)

Aardman's favourite sons brought their Oscar-winning exploits to our consoles in this 3D platformer, filled with loveably cheesy puns (in every sense).

THE LION KING

(Mega Drive - 1994)

A few different versions exist, but we're plumping for the rock-hard platforming and adorable chiptunes of the Mega Drive version. This safari through the film's best scenes will still make you cry, but only because of how hard it is.

SPIDER-MAN 2

(PS2, Xbox, GC - 2004)

Swinging through NYC has never been better than in this superhero adventure. Nailing the grace of how Spidey moves and giving him an open world to do it in meant we actually felt like the wall-crawler for the first time.

GOLDENEYE 007

(N64 - 1997)

Surely this gem needs no introduction. A rare instance where the tie-in is much better than the film it's based on, this FPS legend had the mother of all multiplayer modes and served as the basis for the TimeSplitters series.

THE WARRIORS

(PS2, Xbox - 2005)

As cult as they come, Rockstar took the slick '70s punk film and turned it into a stylish brawler, where every gang in the city was out to rearrange your face. It's much easier to come out and play when the action is this good.

Grab Bag

Retro gems from every era

Awesome Boss!



Super Mario 64

Format N64 **Developer** Nintendo **Released** 1997

Arguably the greatest platformer of all time has one of the greatest boss fights as well. Going into the third dimension gave Mario a chance to circle around his giant nemesis, grab his tail and hurl him around like a shot put. The sight of our Italian plumber twirling Bowser around for fun is another beautiful touch in a game full of them. So long-a, Bowser!

Classic Moment!



Bioshock

Format 360, PC **Developer** 2K Boston **Released** 2007

Ready for a twist? Instead of the seminal "Would you kindly?" reveal, we're going to highlight another moment in BioShock instead. That's the introduction of the Big Daddy, who made it clear early on just how dangerous he could be, turning one of Rapture's residents several shades of red via his drill. Naturally, you would end up fighting a fair few.

Remake Request!



Brian Lara International Cricket

Format PS2, Xbox, PC **Developer** Swordfish Studios **Released** 2005

You might think this is a silly point, but this slog-happy sim was a sporting great back in the day. But, for whatever reason, recent cricket games have failed to bowl us over. So let's head back to the past, give this the polish it deserves, and keep in the classic players as well. Just... don't play it in fancy dress.

Incredibly, Vox has never had any training and naturally looks this regal. Well, she definitely suits fur.

With your CultureMaster ★★ LOUISE BLAIN ★★

REBEL WITHOUT A PAW-SE

Vox might be the world's most famous cosplaying dog. We asked owner **Taylor Creighton** just what goes into making the furry magic happen



It might even be a little bit illegal for Reinhardt to look this joyously happy.

CultureMaster has been the home of many things over the years. A Plants Vs Zombies garden, paper arcade cabinets, an animatronic Five Nights At Freddy's cake, and… cat cosplay. Well, before you hiss at the clear imbalance, it's time to even the furry scales with an interview with one of the most famous online canines, Outside The Vox. While this feature could have been made up entirely of pressing questions as to who is a good dog, we thought it would be best to speak to Vox's owner and cosplay crafter, 23-year-old student Taylor Creighton, to find out more.

"Vox and I started streaming on Twitch with her painting," explains Creighton. "She would paint and then sell her paintings to raise money for animal-related charities. We had an insane boom one day where we went from two viewers to over 3,000 and that's where our crazy journey started. With so many new people I decided to put up a poll asking what they would like to see Vox do on stream next. Cosplay won, and that was when we did our first costume of Tracer."

The combination of an adorable dog, Overwatch, and the internet did exactly what you'd expect it to, and Vox became an overnight sensation. "Her Tracer cosplay blew up and got over two million impressions on Twitter," Creighton says. "It was surreal. After that we kept making costumes because so many people loved them." Creighton has kept up the Overwatch theme, crafting incredible Reaper, Mercy, Genji, and Junkrat costumes (among others) that send Vox's Instagram and Facebook followings mad with squee. And it's not just the outfit; all of Vox's costumes have accessories. Reaper has dual pistols, for example, and Genji a samurai sword.

True collars

Each outfit is carefully hand crafted by Creighton. "Vox's cosplays vary a lot in the amount of time it takes to get done," Creighton explains. "When we first started I would spend maybe six hours max on some costumes, now it takes about 30 hours per costume, sometimes more. Small details take the most time. On her Arthas cosplay from World Of Warcraft, I spent about seven hours cutting and gluing foam scales in a pattern for the 'scale mail' under the armour."

Incredibly, this is Creighton's first time trying her hand at cosplay but she can now happily rustle up a dog-sized version of Reinhardt's hammer or Hanzo's bow. "I'm learning as I go and I think I've improved a lot since our first cosplay was released," she says. "The weapons and wings are all made from pink insulation foam using a Dremel and knife to carve!" Speaking of wings, one of Vox's most impressive outfits is a full-scale Mercy outfit, complete with fully articulated white and yellow wings. Predictably, these were something of a challenge for a fledgling cosplay builder but the results were incredible.

"The most challenging creation so far has to be Mercy," Creighton explains. "Creating her wings out of foam was so tricky and took so much time. One piece

"I SPENT SEVEN HOURS CUTTING AND GLUING FOAM SCALES FOR HER ARTHAS COSPLAY"



Vox effortlessly wins our player of the game but especially for this shot. Great holding skills. 12/10.



As if standard Mercy weren't enough, Creighton took Vox to the woods for a special Halloween shoot.



Mercy's wings were the very first hurdle that new cosplay builder Creighton encountered. Every piece had to be crafted out of foam and layered exactly. She must have felt barking mad...



being slightly off would throw off all the other pieces, so everything had to be just right for it all to fit together properly. Mercy was one of the earlier cosplays and I was still very new to using foam, so it took quite a while!"

Overwatch dogs too

Creighton is now working on her needle and thread technique as the cosplays become more intricate. "I struggle with sewing and that's something I'm really trying to improve on," she concedes. "I can sew some basic things now but nothing really extravagant. I'm always watching YouTube on how to properly sew because it really is so tricky for me to understand how without watching other people do it! Aside from sewing I also watch videos on how to turn foam, worbla, clay, and other things into cosplays. YouTube is an awesome resource."

And if you're looking for tips on how to get your own furry friend into the cosplay game, it's all about patience and plenty of play. "Take your time and, most importantly, have fun," Creighton suggests. "I find making these costumes and working with Vox is a great way to bond with her. She comes running from anywhere in the house when I call her to come try on a costume. Dogs love spending time with their humans!" Before you immediately jump to crafting an Assassin outfit for your canine though, it's worth working out what everyone is comfortable with. A word from the wise suggests food might sweeten the deal... "I know it may be hard to believe, but I have not trained Vox to pose at all. She is just a natural," Creighton explains. "Vox is very calm and lets me position the cosplay any way I need it. I reward her with lots of attention and treats, and before we do any cosplay photoshoots we always go outside and play ball." It looks like Vox deserves it. Good dog definitely confirmed. ■

SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS!

See this!

Keep up with all things Vox-shaped on her dedicated Facebook page: http://bit.ly/gmoutsidethevox



GLOBAL MASTER

The best gaming Funko Pop figures



FOCUS NOW

Dangerously affordable and adorable in equal measure, Funko has taken over the gaming merch world. The Horizon Zero Dawn offerings don't just have an ultra-cute Aloy but also a Watcher you'd actually like to discover you in the long grass and an Eclipse Cultist. Yes, you can buy them all. We won't tell.

CUPWORTHY

While you could spend nine hours straight playing the game howling expletives at the ceiling, it's also entirely possible to settle down for a nice tea and a biscuit with Cuphead and his pal Mugman in Pop Vinyl form. How could such happy faces ever make you so angry? What were you thinking?

GERALT RIGHT

If a game hasn't been Funko-fied does it even exist? Of course Geralt of Rivia is here. We don't advise putting him in a bath, but perhaps on a desk where he can gaze at you sternly and make you feel terrible about eating lunch in front of Buzzfeed again instead of questing outside.





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DEATH STRANDING

PLAYER UNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS

HUGE PS4 PREVIEW BLOWOUT

AND MUCH MORE!

Due to the unpredictable nature of the gaming world, all contents are subject to change.

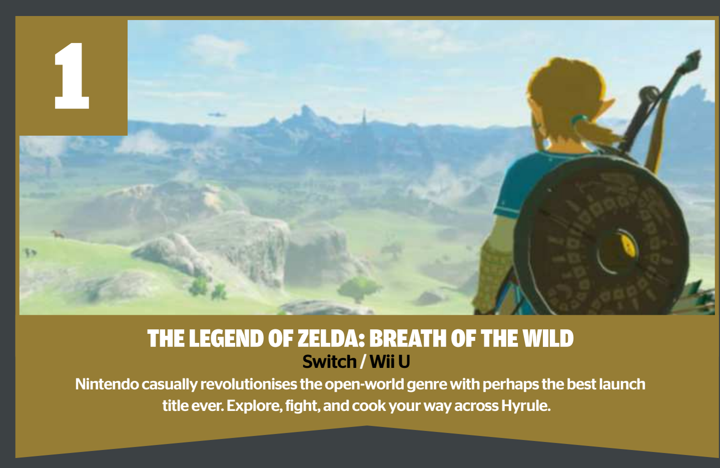
GamesMaster

GAME GUIDE

Our definitive list of the best games to play right now

Not sure which games to grab? Trust the experts (that's us) to shine a light of clarity through your fog of confusion. Over this spread you'll find GamesMaster's 100 per cent scientifically accurate and indisputable list of the greatest games on modern machines – updated monthly – as well as the top five most vital exclusives on each of the major platforms. Pick one of these up and, buddy, you're going to have yourself a good time.

1



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD
Switch / Wii U
Nintendo casually revolutionises the open-world genre with perhaps the best launch title ever. Explore, fight, and cook your way across Hyrule.

2



GRAND THEFT AUTO V
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360
Rockstar's most detailed, immersive cityscape yet serves as the backdrop for a brilliantly explosive, multi-layered crime saga.

3



THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT
PS4 / XO / PC
An unbelievably vast fantasy world, where grim adventure – and brilliantly mature, engaging storytelling – lurks around every corner.

4



THE LAST OF US
PS4 / PS3
Naughty Dog's greatest triumph yet: the dark and truly cinematic tale of Joel and Ellie, two survivors in a dying world.

5



DARK SOULS III
PS4 / XO / PC
Take on some of gaming's most unforgiving enemies in weighty, impactful battles. There are few games more satisfying to beat.

6



PERSONA 5
PS4 / PS3
The greatest JRPG on current-gen – a stylish, rebellious story of teenage fury and surreal journeys into your enemies' minds.

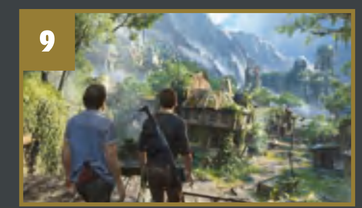
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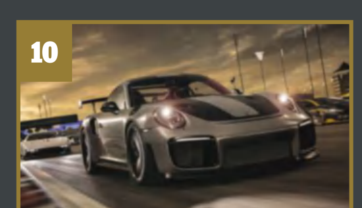
HORIZON: ZERO DAWN
PS4
A truly unique vision from the creators of Killzone. Primitive humans hunt robotic beasts across a beautiful wilderness.



SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
Switch / Wii U
Switch's first Mario game is also one of the best ever, taking you on an unashamedly joyous globe-trotting adventure.



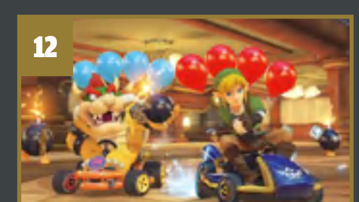
UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
PS4
An incredible end to one of the most spectacular series around, seeing Nathan Drake off in style. One of the best-looking games ever made.



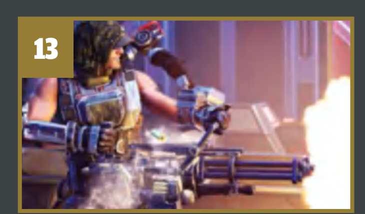
FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
XO / PC
The best entry in the series yet, and one of the greatest racing games ever made. It's absolutely gorgeous to boot.



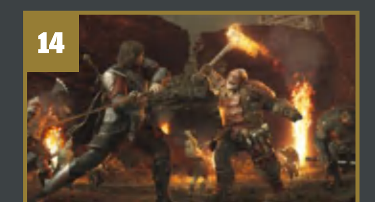
OVERWATCH
PS4 / XO / PC
Colourful characters and slick shooting make this multiplayer FPS from the makers of World Of Warcraft utterly irresistible.



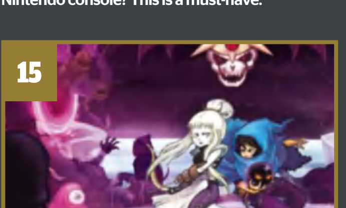
MARIO KART 8
Switch / Wii U
The definitive kart racer, now portable and packed with new features on Switch. Own a Nintendo console? This is a must-have.



XCOM 2
PS4 / XO / PC
A turn-based strategy masterpiece that doesn't pull its punches. Try not to get too attached to your soldiers, eh?



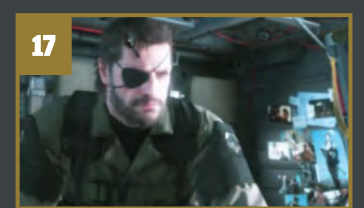
MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF WAR
PS4 / XO / PC
Solid third-person action elevated by its incredible system of procedurally-generated orcs, each with their own personality.



TOWERFALL ASCENSION
Switch / PS4 / XO / PC / PS Vita
A true legend of local multiplayer action that still eats up our office lunchtimes to this day. The very definition of easy to learn, hard to master.



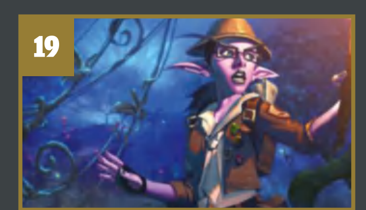
HELLBLADE: SENUA'S SACRIFICE
PS4 / PC
A harrowing journey into a mythological underworld serves as the perfect backdrop to an exploration of real-world mental illness.



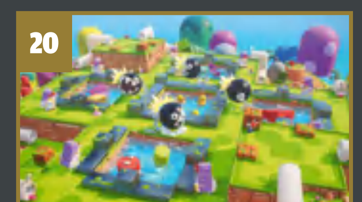
METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360
Hideo Kojima's last hurrah brings open-world action to the revered series.



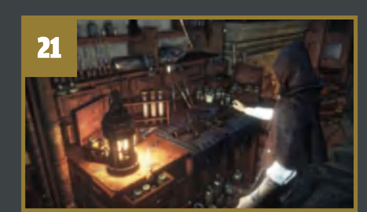
DOTA 2
PC
A strange and intimidating beast - but take the time to learn its secrets and you'll find a game of incredible tactical depth and variety.



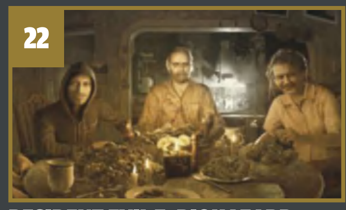
HEARTHSTONE
PC / Mobile
Blizzard achieves the once-impossible - making deck-building CCGs accessible to all. Prepare to lose all your free time in 15-minute chunks.



MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOMS BATTLE
Switch
Don't let its cute looks fool you - this is a tight and devilishly difficult turn-based strategy game.



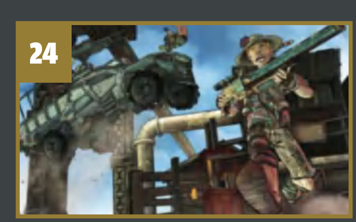
BLOODBORNE
PS4
Dark Souls' more agile cousin, tighter and faster but no less punishing, in a world of gothic horror and Lovecraftian nightmares.



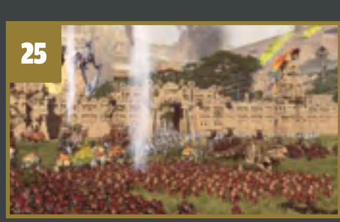
RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD
PS4 / XO / PC
First-person horror action that both pays fitting tribute to the series' past, and tries something totally different. Even more terrifying in VR.



PYRE
PS4 / PC
This spellbinding follow-up to Bastion seamlessly blends intricate storytelling with... well, magical basketball, basically. Trust us, it works.



TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360 / Mobile
Telltale's formula at its very best - witty, exciting, and packed with unforgettable characters. Don't be put off by the setting.



TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER II
PC
Strategy gaming on an incredible scale, in a gloriously over-the-top fantasy world. Get the first one too and you can combine them!

THE TOP EXCLUSIVES
The five best for each console



1. FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
2. HALO 5: GUARDIANS
3. KALIMBA
4. QUANTUM BREAK
5. GEARS OF WAR 4



1. THE LAST OF US REMASTERED
2. HORIZON: ZERO DAWN
3. UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
4. HELLBLADE
5. BLOODBORNE



1. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD
2. SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
3. MARIO KART 8 DELUXE
4. MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOM BATTLE
5. ARMS



1. DOTA 2
2. TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER II
3. GUILD WARS 2
4. THE SIMS 4
5. CRUSADER KINGS 2



1. POKÉMON SUN AND MOON
2. FIRE EMBLEM FATES
3. ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF
4. MONSTER HUNTER GENERATIONS
5. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS



1. HEARTHSTONE
2. DEVICE 6
3. 80 DAYS
4. SORCERY 4
5. MONUMENT VALLEY

THE GAMESMASTER QUIZ OF THE YEAR 2017

How well do you know GM? These ten fiendish questions, covering the last 12 months of issues, will test even the most loyal reader...

Q1
What was our highest-scoring game of the year, with a magnificent 96%?

Q2
"Those beefy thighs would go on to enrapture an entire generation of stealth gamers" – who was our RetroMaster referring to?

Q3
Which title did we describe as "the only Star Wars game in which you'll find randy alien horses"?

Q4
Which game featured in IndieMaster this year will see you "pedal into danger and face threats head-on with frisbees", according to developer Moo Yu?

Q5
Who did we award our Best Character honour to in our awards issue?

Q6
Which film did we describe as "not perfect by any means... but definitely the best console-to-cinema translation we've seen"?

Q7
What were our two lowest-scored games of the year, with an embarrassing 42% each?

Q8
Which game took the top spot in our reader-voted Most Wanted the most times this year, with an amazing seven victories?

Q9
Which Hurley Access ended with, among other things, Leon's dogs and chickens burning alive in lava?

Q10
Which games developer killed us in Knack II co-op by punching us into the path of an oncoming boulder?

Answers:
Q1 The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild (GM315)
Q2 Sam Fisher (GM316)
Q3 Star Wars Episode I: The Gungan Frontier (GM317)
Q4 Knights And Bikes (GM312)
Q5 Naomi Detox from Let It Die (GM324)
Q6 Assassin's Creed (GM313)
Q7 Syberia 3 (GM318) and Mario Sports Superstars (GM314)
Q8 Red Dead Redemption 2
Q9 Maia (GM322)
Q10 Mark Cerny (GM320)

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UNDER NIGHT IN-BIRTH

Exe:Late[st]

The deep darkness of the hollow night. New shells of incarnation alight.
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